ENGLISH STUDIES IN AFRICA

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Volume 1 March, 1958 Number 1

FOREWORD

By the Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, The Honourable Richard Feetham, C.M.G., M.A., Hon. LL.D.

I am very glad to welcome, on its first appearance, *English Studies in Africa,* issued under the auspices of our South African Universities, which is henceforth to appear twice a year.

The title chosen boldly proclaims that those who are responsible for launching this new periodical look forward to establishing by its means contact with teachers of English, not only in South Africa, but in all parts of the continent of Africa where the English language is used and studied.

I hope that this object may be achieved, and that *English Studies in Africa* may thus have a far-reaching influence in helping to uphold, and maintain, high standards in the use and teaching of the English language, and to stimulate the study of English literature, in many widely distributed African centres.

25 October, 1957.

EDITORIAL

ENGLISH SCHOLARSHIP: A TRANSMUTATION OF SPECIES

A. C. PARTRIDGE.

". . . the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence."

T. S. Eliot.

A new journal of English studies can be justified only by the purpose it has to serve. The task of *English Studies in Africa* will be to serve the English language on this Continent, and to promote the study of the best English literature, wherever it was written. A great tradition in the hands of a minority group, as the English-speaking people happen to be in Africa, must give tangible evidence of the will of the group to survive. The sponsors of this journal invite other universities in Africa to co-operate in declaring the aims and vigour of their purpose.

To mobilize and make articulate the ideals for which English culture, in the broadest sense, has always stood, is an undertaking beset with peculiar difficulties. The English inheritance has demonstrated, for centuries, its individualism and its desire for self-determination; yet that urge has never been inconsistent with the cohesion that a colourful history and a rich literature help to ensure. Diffusion of a culture carries with it both strength and weakness. There is a danger, now, that rival English-speaking cultures, evolved in different continents, may press their claims to recognition at the expense of the parent tradition itself. English is one heritage, and except in the assessment of fundamental values, it should not be divided against itself. The hiving-off of satellite English-speaking cultures, with local dialects and ideologies, would be unfortunate for the amity and understanding in which the richness and diversity of a culture reside.

One of the special objects of *English Studies in Africa* will be the improvement of standards and techniques in English education. The quality both of teaching and examining has been notoriously unequal in the British Commonwealth. Disparate views on the purpose and methods of English studies have made reform tentative and difficult. These divisions stem from England itself, and have often been militant, since the

orthodoxy of the earlier generation of English professors was challenged by a group of lively minds at Cambridge, now christened by Mr John Holloway "The New Establishment in Criticism" (*The Listener,* 20th and 27th September, 1956). The general belief in England is that the Cambridge movement owed its origin to the thinking of I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis, although they owe little to each other. Because there is a greater need for experiment abroad, the campaign has been waged on distant frontiers more vehemently than in England itself; but there is, as yet, no split in English schools comparable to the division of scholastic logicians and neo-Platonists in the later Middle Ages. The sensible scholar, realizing that the wallet of doctrinal disillusion at time's back is certain to bring compromise, has, so far, avoided unswerving allegiance to Eliot or Richards or Leavis. The sponsors of this journal hope to allow for the uses of diversity, and to show that the schools of Oxford, Cambridge, London, Harvard and Yale are, in reality, complementary.

Academic English studies, as we know them, belong strictly to the age of Honours schools, established in Britain in the nineties of the last century. Oxford, as the seat of the Humanities, was rightly expected to give the lead; but the struggle to exact the grudging acceptance in 1893 of the Honours School there was long and bitter. In the organon of the principal architects of Honours courses, A. C. Bradley, Macneile Dixon and W. P. Ker, there was little danger of critical arteries being hardened by linguistic grinds (rhetorical or philological), or unreasonable attention to social history. When they sought, for English, the prestige of specialization already accorded to other subjects, they were conscious of the limitations of the discipline they had inherited. For a further decade, however, the English university teacher, with the privilege of having read Honours in English, remained a *rara avis.* The first in Scotland (and probably in Britain) was David Nichol Smith at Edinburgh in 1895. In London, the first M.A. degrees were granted to five external candidates in 1899; the M.A. in English for internal students was introduced in 1903.

As the history of university English studies is little known, and has so important a bearing on some present aspects of teaching, it is not irrelevant to consider the roll of first occupants of English Chairs in some leading universities of Great Britain. Their dates of appointment and names are as follows:

1760 Rev. Hugh Blair, University of Edinburgh.
1828 Rev. Thomas Dale, University College, London.
1849 George Lillie Craik, Queen's College, Belfast.
1862 John Nichol, University of Glasgow.
1866 Adolphus William Ward, Owen's College, Manchester.
1867 Edward Dowden, Trinity College, Dublin.
1881 Edward Arber, Mason Science College, Birmingham.
1882 Andrew Cecil Bradley, University College, Liverpool.
1883 William Paton Ker, University College, Cardiff.
1894 Herbert John Clifford Grierson, University of Aberdeen.
1896 George Charles Moore Smith, Firth College, Sheffield.
1900 William Macneile Dixon, University of Birmingham.
1901 Charles Harold Herford, University of Manchester.
1903 Oliver Elton, University of Liverpool.
1904 Walter Raleigh, University of Oxford.
1905 George Gregory Smith, University of Belfast.
1911 Arthur Quiller Couch, University of Cambridge.*

Early professors of English, for instance, A. W. Ward, A. C. Bradley, W. P. Ker and G. C. Moore Smith, were mainly reared on the Classics, and a few were also theologians; Ward was primarily an historian and Arber originally a civil servant. For a prospective student of English literature, it was, indeed, difficult to decide what subject to read at an English university.

Edinburgh University was the pioneer, with its Chair of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres just after the middle of the 18th Century, an off-shoot of the Department of Logic. The logician, Professor Stevenson, enthralled his classes by drawing many of his illustrations of good and bad thinking from the English writers of the previous age. The need for the closer study of English arose partly from its replacement of Latin as the medium of instruction at Edinburgh University, and partly from the popularity of subscription courses in English Literature, held in Coffee-Houses and hired rooms. Under the stimulus of the Scottish Maecenas, Lord Kames, cultural interests and associations were formed after the Union with England to sublimate the older polemic activities of the nation. The great preacher of St Giles, Rev. Hugh Blair, was selected as the first professor, and his impact on the community was immediate. His lectures, eventually published, were trans-

*There had, however, been a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, Walter Skeat, since 1878; and a Lecturer in English Literature, Israel Gollancz, since 1896.

lated into three European languages, and were still in use by the first Professor of English Literature in London, Rev. Thomas Dale, in 1828. Sir Walter Scott was actually offered, but declined, the Chair in the early 19th Century. The most notable professors of the Victoria era were William Spalding, the Shakespearian scholar, William Aytoun, the ballad poet, David Masson, editor and biographer of Milton, and George Saintsbury, the first systematic historian of literary criticism. The curriculum, until 1895, had consisted largely of style and composition, and a survey of English Literature, with some attention to social history. Masson and Saintsbury gave to literature a dignified and substantial place in University studies.

Dr Dale, who blazed the path of English studies in London, was a churchman and moral philosopher, rather in the narrow sense. His single claim to originality was an introductory lecture to Blair's course, though he later edited, and wrote a life of, William Cowper. Ruskin, who attended some of his lectures, spoke of him in terms of contempt more violent than those of the Cambridge don, who referred to "Gower Street's curst Academy". Among Dale's successors were Latham, A. H. Clough (the poet), Masson (who later went to Edinburgh) and Henry Morley. When the universally admired Morley retired in 1889, he was succeeded by W. P. Ker, from Cardiff. This notable scholar founded the English Honour School in London, just before the turn of the century. There had been much agitation, stimulated by the aggressive University Extension lecturer, J. C. Collins (afterwards Professor of English at Birmingham), for the establishment of specialist schools in English Literature in all the universities in the country. The usual prejudices, which took time to overcome, were that universities could not examine in literary taste and personal predilections; that critical views would be got by heart; and that, in the words of Professor Freeman of Oxford, "all would evaporate in dilettantism".

The position at Oxford in the latter part of the 19th Century was rather complicated. There had been an honorary, not a teaching, Professorship of Poetry since the reign of Queen Anne (1708), though the earliest holders (indeed all before Matthew Arnold) lectured in Latin and paid scant attention to English poetry. The Rawlinson Chair of Anglo-Saxon was founded in 1795, and had two able Professors in Joseph Bosworth and John Earle from 1849 to 1903. A Chair of Comparative

Philology, created in 1868, was held first by Max Müller and, from 1901, by Joseph Wright. 'A period or subject in English Literature' had been included as a subject for the *pass* degree in 1873, and Balliol College, under the liberal mastership of Benjamin Jowett, appointed A. C. Bradley as College Lecturer in English, as early as 1876. When the University Chair of English Language and Literature was eventually established in 1885, it went to an eminent English philologist (from a Chair in Germany), Professor A. S. Napier. There was a strong movement to press the claims of Matthew Arnold; and, as it turned out, Napier lectured on no author later than Chaucer. But it was nineteen years before the spirit of the Statute was honoured, which required that equal attention should be given to language and literature, by the creation of a separate Chair of English Literature, to which the experienced and resourceful Sir Walter Raleigh was appointed in 1904.

The South African College, Cape Town (founded 1829, and parent of the present University), had one professor for English and Classics until 1860. The first scholar (a classicist) to give adequate attention to the study of literature at the Cape was Rev. James Cameron in 1858; but he soon decided to devote himself to Classics and the Church, and English was transferred to a polymath and journalist, Professor Roderick Noble, who held simultaneously the Chair of Physical Science from 1860 to 1875. It was in his time (1873) that the B.A. degree was inaugurated*. Candidates were examined in Literature (including the ancient classics) and Science until 1884, when the Honours degree in Literature and Philosophy was offered, a decade before a similar degree in English was possible in Britain. Noble's great achievement was the editorship of the longest-lived of South Africa's literary monthlies, *The Cape Monthly Magazine*. Of his successors, F. W. Bindley was the first to hold a separate Chair of English; but H. M. Foot became Professor of both English and Philosophy, a fact which had some bearing on the combination in the Honours course from 1884.

It was men like Bradley, Ker, Saintsbury, Raleigh, de Selincourt and Elton who principally gave direction to modern English literary studies. These were all great names, with remarkable

*The examining body was the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which had been granted a charter by the British Government. Candidates were placed in order of merit, and Honours (with a Scholarship) were given in the subject or subjects in which a certain percentage of marks had been obtained.

capacities both for leadership and scholarship. Much of their work, in published scope and critical importance, is unlikely to be superseded. Others were fortunate in the longevity of their tenure, for example, Dowden (46 years) and Masson (42 years).

By 1914 the four main currents of academic study in English, the creative, exegetic, historico-social and linguistic, had been charted. Literature at the universities was clearly intended, not as professional training, but for cultivation of the mind. The divided aims of the present generation had not, as yet, thrown students into serious confusion. The major conflict was between the relative claims of literature and philology. Scholars, critics and philologists were the deliberate products of the University schools; creative writers had to sink or swim by the same methods; in fact, most professors followed the wisdom of Saintsbury in disclaiming any responsibility for the latter. Literary appreciation was largely by the comparative method, less by the close verbal analysis of writing, which would have narrowed the field of study considerably. The need was, at this stage, for comprehensive surveys, usually of the historical kind; or, as Saintsbury saw it, "first to construct, and then to fill in, a map of literature". Academic minds, trained in Classics, adapted themselves readily to these methods of investigation and tuition.

After the first World War a new generation of scholars arose, destined by choice to be professional critics and literary consultants. They held that it was not possible to acquire values by attending to *ex cathedra* statements about them. Their method of teaching was partly psychological, designed to exercise the mind and make it receptive to literary excellence of the imaginative kind. The word 'sensibility' was bandied about prodigously, meaning education of the feelings and taste by the detailed analysis of select passages; phrases such as 'image pattern' and 'poetic texture' were in the mouths of most of the new critics. Mature emotions were said to be the suitably disciplined ones. The elect were unwilling to be seduced into the by-paths of social history, biography and philology, as irrelevent to the functions of pure criticism. They disliked theory, particularly of a pholosophic or aesthetic kind, but stressed the importance of critico-ethical imperatives.

These ideals are now widespread, and are as remote from the teaching of the older classical humanists of the 19th Century as any statement of aims could be. A better example of the Victorian concept of the purpose of literature could hardly be found, out-

side the pages of Arnold, than the following extract from an essay written by Professor James Cameron, of Cape Town, in 1869:

> We wish to *educate* the higher nature — to bring out its powers, to make its ear delicately keen to all the deep harmonies of Truth, and its eye quick to discern the spiritual beauties which other eyes have not seen and duller ears have never heard. And whatever helps to do this is an element in true education — *useful* in the large and noble sense of the word — a living stone in the walls of an Eternal Temple.
>
> It is not memory alone and the reasoning faculties that need culture, — the judgment, the taste, the imagination, the sense of beauty must be cared for.
>
> The end of all literary studies is to expand the mind by familiarity with the noblest products of the human intellect.
>
> It is a rich inheritance that we have received, and if we would hand it down not impoverished, but strengthened, it must be by duly appreciating the relations that we bear to it. They who have no past can have no future. It is as wise for races as for individuals to wish their "days to be bound each to each in natural piety;" and an indispensable condition to our contributing anything to other generations, either in science, literature, or politics, is that we forbear to look on what we have as the fruit of our own toil, but reverently and gratefully own our debts to other and earlier nations.

Noble words these, and by no means mere rhetoric. The middle paragraphs give some weight to the use of sensibility, taste and judgment. But the main emphasis in literary studies is differently placed; it is on the continuity of the spirit of man, his function as torch-bearer of a stable morality and acknowledged aesthetic values. By relinquishing this pristine urbanity and moral toughness, there may be some gain in percipience; but is there not some loss in wisdom, tolerance and broader culture?

Personal reactions to literature are of many kinds, ranging from the formal and structural to the imaginative and spiritual. Is there any valid reason why sensibility should be contaminated by theory or principle? Without some scheme of general principles, young intelligences flounder in a subjective morass; critical judgment becomes obscure, whimsical or chaotic. However immediate may be their responses, the young are usually unsure of themselves,

and conscious of their own immaturity. And not without reason; for "judgment of style", as Longinus long ago pointed out, "is the last and crowning fruit of long experience".

The flood of ideas set in motion by the new critical liberalism cannot now be contained. It must, therefore, be scrutinized with the utmost vigilance. Literature should not be surrendered to the doctrine-mongers, any more than to the mental and moral or other scientists; it has a traditional discipline of taste, judgment and principle, confirmed by the experience of older generations. Despite its present indigestible bulk, it is a craft not to be apportioned and weighed by the intellectual dietitian, but dedicated to healthy appetites. It is a craft for the devotee, the epicure, the natural man who respects his individuality too much to sacrifice it to the Frankenstein of modern higher education. Literature, as training for the mind, is a means, not an end; a discipline that enriches, not a substitute for the eternal verities. That discipline can never be final or decisive. It proceeds by the time-honoured method of experiment, adjustment and result, and adapts itself to the needs of succeeding generations.

While learning must ever be grateful for the specialist, the future of English studies would be brighter if a workable integration of language and literature could be found, whether the subject be *Beowulf* or Dylan Thomas. Most universities still conduct these studies in unnecessary isolation, exponents of one field putting the telescope to the blind eye when viewing the work of the other. There is a current impression that the scientific acumen required for linguistics is alien to the aesthetic and critical gifts needed for the study of literature. The time has come to review this dichotomy, at any rate at the undergraduate level, and encourage the mutual dependence of the two disciplines. Common ground is the effect of the suggestive meaning and pattern of words upon the mind's capacity for understanding and enjoying; syntax, not as logical analysis, but as a synthetic element in the cultivation of style. R. W. Chambers's *On the Continuity of English Prose,* H. Bradley's *The Making of English,* and some chapters of Jespersen's *Growth and Structure of the English Language,* McKnight's *Modern English in the Making,* Jones's *Triumph of the English Language* and Vallins's *The Pattern of English* are examples of the possible direction of such teaching.

Dr Johnson, in compiling his *Dictionary,* had the sense to perceive that valid examples of English usage and meaning must

be sought in the work of the best writers. Milton saw that grammar was merely "an introduction to the understanding of authors", and that if it was "made too long or exquisite" for the student, it tended to mortify his courage. Under modern conditions, creative writing that is widely read cannot but give vigour and purpose to the meaning and use of words. While, for the linguist, common speech must remain his primary concern, especially for pronunciation, a proper purview of his subject will ultimately depend on the study of expressive writing. The future of language ought not to be left to the many semi-literate debasers of speech, but shaped by those whose days are devoted to the vital use of words.

The history of English studies, especially since the 18th Century, should be better known than it is. Professor D. Nichol Smith's lectures on the subject at Oxford came as a revelation to most of his students. The corpus of English literary history, scholarship and criticism, its evolution, place and value, became intelligible to all for the first time. It has been largely owing to his efforts, and those of his successor Professor F. P. Wilson, that the English school of post-graduate studies at Oxford has reached its present flourishing condition of nearly a hundred researchers, and that the Oxford tradition for sound textual and critical scholarship is being maintained.

Further insight into the history of English studies might remove many anomolies, such as the claims of modern critics to their supposed innovations. It would also provide the answer to fliting, fabulous criticism of English schools, such as Stephen Potter's *The Muse in Chains* (Jonathan Cape, 1937), which does not appear to have been satisfactorily refuted. The irony of its flippancy is that the imbedded truth is sometimes neglected; for instance, Potter's rejection of an 'absolute' hierachy of great writers, supported by historical graphs to show that all are liable to the vagaries of critical fashion; and his suggestion that "the critical credentials of a writer, who is in no sense a creator, are never questioned". "The function of criticism", says Potter, "is not something mysteriously settled before criticism started and therefore not worth discussing . . . Questions like the Value of Rules, and the difference between judging by feelings and judging by rules, must be clearly known before criticism is attempted at all."

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

E. DAVIS

HAZLITT, who was almost immune from the nineteenth-century degeneration of taste, thought *Troilus and Cressida* "the most loose and desultory" of Shakespeare's plays. "It rambles on just as it happens", he says, but admits it "overtakes a prodigious number of fine things in its way". Later critics, more deeply imbued with the love for mental crinolines, agree that it is an 'unpleasant' play. Almost everyone alleges that Shakespeare was feeling out of sorts when he wrote it.

Why? The theme is a universal one: the story of a commonplace woman with the commonplace woman's tendency to be 'realistic' about the power of whatever prettiness she has: to clutch at whatever it attracts, and to count the bird in hand as worth two in any bush. That commonplace men act similarly doesn't annul her meanness, for the game, trial, conspiracy, partnership, or martyrdom of love (whatever it happens to be) is based on the convention that it is by no means of her choosing, and cannot begin (as an affair *à deux)* without her consent. Shakespeare in *The Tempest* and other plays makes a girl seem wholly lovable and utterly honest because of the courage with which she defies this convention; but in those of his women who accept it there is no sign of any tendency to abuse it; or, if there is such a tendency, they are damned black, like Regan and Goneril.

In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare is not intent on meting out justice to Cressida. She is left unscathed. So is the Greek for whom she jilted a prince of her own people. A moment or two of self-reproach, during which she blames her 'sex' for making her disloyal, is all she has to suffer. One gathers that Diomedes survived to enjoy her at his leisure; and that indeed the only penalty these two had to pay was the possession of each other.

Cressida's wretched little story is only part of the theme. The other is the fall of Hector. The whole theme is in the contrast: Hector is crushed; Cressida survives. Hector's fall, if it can be attributed to anything in Hector, may be set down as the penalty he had to pay for an excess of virtue: excessive courage, literally that, not rashness; excessive honourableness, literally that, not over-trustfulness; excessive magnanimity, neither vanity nor pride.

He has those virtues in an extraordinary degree; and they remain virtues, because they do not reach the imbecilic extremes where they must degenerate into vices. He could not, as the foremost warrior of the Trojan army, pay any attention to Cassandra's warnings. He could not draw back from his solemn undertaking to go out and do battle with the Greeks. There is nothing of Cressida in him.

He is murdered by a male version of Cressida; by the Achilles who has vowed not to fight, and who breaks this vow when it suits him; by the Greek who values his own honour above that of the whole Grecian army, yet does not hesitate to profit from the chance that places Hector, unarmed, in his power. Even though Hector has previously caught Achilles unarmed and chivalrously refused to take advantage of the man, Achilles slaughters Hector with less compunction than Cressida shows in betraying Troilus. The two acts of treachery are different in degree but the same in kind.

Troilus fights at Hector's side, eager for the blood of Diomedes. He is thwarted and returns to Troy exclaiming:

Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe.

Since Troy was doomed, since Troy is *par excellence* the tragic city, a symbol of unavailing courage and pride, the fate of Troilus is more wretched, the pain in it more protracted, than Hector's. He has done nothing to deserve it. He has been a true lover as Hector was a true warrior. It was his misfortune, not his fault, that Cressida's uncle, Pandarus, had helped him in the wooing of Cressida. It is as if a carrion-eating hyaena had taken it upon himself to befriend a noble young stallion. Pandarus cackles, Pandarus promises. Pandarus performs, and cackles again. There is a reek of rottenness from all he says and does. He enjoys the spectacle of Troilus's torture; he whips up his longings; and when they are, for the time, answered, he gloats as if Troilus had his own carrion tastes and is feeding full on the loathsomeness he himself hungers after.

Pandarus, like Troy, is a symbol; a symbol of what the world does to whatever being a little higher than itself allows it an inch or two of familiarity. It credits that being with its own vileness, and takes on airs of righteous indignation when its further advances are rebuffed:

O world! world! world! thus is the poor agent despised!

Utterly insensitive to the tragedy he has helped to bring about,

without a scrap of shame on behalf of his worthless niece or of pity for the betrayed and defeated Troilus, Pandarus regards his own discomfort as the greatest tragedy of all.

But there are others who contribute at least as much to the tragedy. There is Cressida's father, Calchas, the traitor-priest, whose suggestion it is that Antenor, the Trojan prisoner-of-war, should be exchanged for his daughter; there is the whole complication of internal jealousies in the Grecian camp to ensure that Achilles should enter the battle with no thought of honour in his head; and in Troy itself there is the strain of corruption that comes from the presence of Helen and the former perfidy of Paris.

We should be hard put to it to believe in the immaculate honour of Hector, or in the loyalty and worth of Troilus, contrasting as they do with Pandarus's filth, Cressida's faithlessness, the unscrupulousness of Diomedes, the sulks of Achilles, the brayings of Ajax, and the snarls of Thersites, if it were not for the extraordinary mental stature which Shakespeare takes care to give Ulysses.

Ulysses is portrayed as the wisest of the wise, as shrewd and penetrating almost beyond human limits. It is he who makes the Greek leaders pretend that they no longer consider Achilles worth attending to and that they have transferred their interest to the blockhead Ajax. Achilles reacts almost exactly as Ulysses predicts in time to pluck the thorn, Hector, out of the smarting side of the Greeks. Had Ulysses's plans succeeded in every detail, Troilus, too, would have been destroyed; for it was not out of idle malice that Ulysses led him to the spectacle of Cressida's yielding. An anger-maddened man does not fight cautiously; and an incautious soldier, no matter how brave, is almost bound to die. Ulysses was intent on destroying two formidable Trojans at one stroke, and it was only chance that thwarted him in this.

But these are trifles compared with Ulysses's chief function in the play. This is, to give us the most convincing and least biased opinion of the relative merits of Troilus, of Hector, and the wretch Cressida. Troilus, entangled by Pandarus, or bemused by his embraces of Cressida, is in no state to reveal his worth. Hector, plagued by the entreaties of his people, twitted by others, acts rather than speaks. His absolute honourableness is only sampled, not fully shown, when he scorns to take unfair advantages in battle and dies, astonished that unfair advantages should have been taken of him. If it were not for what Ulysses says of these

two, (and for the intellectual stature of Ulysses himself), we should have no means of realizing that the two noblest characters in the play are its chief victims.

Ulysses says, of Troilus, that he is

> The youngest son of Priam, a true knight,
> Not yet mature, yet matchless, firm of word,
> Speaking in deeds and deedless in his tongue,
> Not soon provoked nor being provoked soon calm'd;
> His heart and hand both open and both free;
> For what he has he gives, what thinks he shows;
> Yet gives he not till judgment guides his bounty,
> Nor dignifies an impair thought with breath;
> Manly as Hector, but more dangerous;
> For Hector in his blaze of wrath subscribes
> To tender objects, but he in heat of action
> Is more vindicative than jealous love;

It is not often that Shakespeare relies so heavily, for the presentment of a character, on the recital of hearsay evidence about him. True, we learn something of what Hamlet was at his best, and of what he might have been had he been fitly befriended, in Ophelia's speech about "the glass of fashion and the mould of form"; but Hamlet is given ample opportunity, in the exercise of his wit, in his byplay with Osric and his swordplay with Laertes, in his dealings with the actors, the pirates, his mother, his spying friends, and perhaps even in his dealings with Ophelia herself, to bear out in deeds what Ophelia claims in words. In *Cymbeline* we learn much about all the major characters from what they say themselves and from what they do. In *Troilus and Cressida* the action is so rapid, and the characters so impassioned in what they do, that though they reveal their essential defects very clearly they have almost no opportunity to display their excellences. Hector's chivalry in battle costs him his life. This is not really a fault in him at all; but the outcome of his generosity towards the unarmed Achilles is his own destruction, so that, but for the testimony of Ulysses, we should have no chance of realizing that "Hector in his blaze of wrath subscribes to tender objects," that the man fought like a saint, in fact, and not (as we may be apt to think) like a fool.

Troilus is given even less opportunity to display his virtue. He is gulled and thwarted all along the line; by Pandarus, by Cressida, and by fate itself.

If we take the common view of things, and pay tribute only to what succeeds, then we must end by despising Hector and Troilus, and by identifying ourselves with that rottenness in the world which is Hamlet's chief nightmare (a horror far outweighing the importunities of the Ghost), with the rottenness embodied in

> The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of misprized love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes . . . ,

and with the dreadful trap whose jaws close so suddenly about Hector, and with such awful deliberateness about Troilus.

This indeed is the trap which the play as a whole sets for whoever reads it, and this is why *Troilus and Cressida* has been labelled by so many august critics as 'unpleasant'. It is certainly not a pleasant thing to watch a cruel fate descend on two fine men who have done nothing to deserve it. If in watching Hector display his chivalry we think, 'The more fool he!' we ourselves are nipped by the trap; for the play is a protest against the dominance in this life of such as Achilles. It is equally a protest against the triumph of Cressida. In a world whose most longed-for rewards are designed for strong men and pretty women (i.e. for the rich, the unscrupulous, and the wholly mercenary), it is difficult not to accept the standards which make such as Hector seem idiotic and such as Troilus mere simpletons. We are encouraged to respect these standards from infancy. What nursery-tale has a permanently weak hero or a chronically ugly heroine? A play which demonstrates that, in this world, magnanimity and reliance on the magnanimity of others are weaknesses, though it confirms us in our secret beliefs, and though it strengthens the currish faith that is common to us all, must seem unpleasant if only because it demonstrates our currishness. It is no use our railing against the world, and so hoping to clear ourselves of the charge which *Troilus and Cressida* levels against us, for the more vehemently we rail the more closely we resemble that cur of curs, that "bastard begot, bastard instructed bastard in mind, bastard in valour, in everything illegitimate" Thersites.

Ulysses's tribute to Hector and Troilus, and his summing up of Cressida

> fie, fie, upon her!
> There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out

At every joint and motive of her body.
O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give accosting welcome ere it comes.
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
To every ticklish reader! set them down
For sluttish spoils of opportunity,
And daughters of the game,—

are guide enough to what our opinion of these three should be; yet the play is so cleverly balanced that it is not every 'ticklish reader', still less anyone in an audience that happens to be 'tickle o' the sere', who can observe the trap involved. Notice that Ulysses speaks of Cressida in the plural. She is one of 'these encounters'. When he speaks to Achilles, he generalizes — about fame and greatness, "Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back . . ." He flatters him with offensive fullness, calls him "thou great and complete man"; yet mentions nothing about him that is at all extraordinary.

If, in spite of this, we think of Cressida as extraordinarily faithless, or of Achilles as extraordinarily unscrupulous, we have missed the point of the play. What is worse, we have established ourselves in the centre of the target at which its satire is aimed. For if we do not see that Cressida represents the norm of womankind (and their secret ideal, an ideal on which few of them find much difficulty in patterning themselves), while Achilles represents as much for men, we must feel that both Hector and Troilus lacked that grain of ordinary common sense which would have insured them against defeat and betrayal. If they lacked this, and if this lack were their *hamartia,* there would be nothing satirical in the play. It would be a tragedy indistinguishable in its tone and intention from *King Lear.*

Yet it is closer to *Hamlet. Troilus and Cressida* may, in fact, be regarded either as a preliminary attempt at or a sardonic echo of *Hamlet.* Its central sufferers exhibit two aspects of that many-sided man: Hector is the Hamlet of the duel scene, the disregarder of feminine warnings, the chivalrous fighter who does not dream of poisoned swords; Troilus is the Hamlet who trusts his sweetheart and does not dream of the forces that will make her betray him. Ulysses is a Polonius grown to Olympian stature, with all the folly and vanity shed. It is a grim thought, and one that adds point to the satire of the lesser play, that the world as a whole has chosen to remember Polonius's 'precepts' about neither

borrowing nor lending, good taste in dress, good manners in peace or conflict, how to choose one's friends, and the like, while it ignores Ulysses's much profounder summing-up of the ingredients that make 'a true knight'.

The comparison with *Hamlet* is valuable, if only because it accentuates the greatness of Ulysses. He calls Troilus "a true knight" and leaves us no excuse for thinking of him in any other way. This being so, it is not so much Cressida who brings Troilus misery as the incorrigible untruth and systematic negation of knighthood with which the world as a whole confronts him; and in case we miss this point, there is always Thersites to drive it home. Whatever Thersites says is disgusting; and it is all the more disgusting for its half-truth. He spits contempt on the whole world. Ulysses is the only character at whom he does not snarl. He himself is not exempt from his own venom. Immediately before he curses Hector he calls himself, among other things, "a very filthy rogue".

If we read *Troilus and Cressida* in such a way as to accept Thersites's half-truths, and find the notion of a "true knight" absurd against the background of the world's corruption, then we identify ourselves with a very filthy rogue. If we read it, and think Troilus a fool to have trusted Cressida, then we identify ourselves both with the Cressida who betrayed him and the Achilles who murdered Hector. We then become the world that makes Hector's chivalry nonsensical, Cressida's treachery a matter of course, the braying of Ajax the high road to success, and the fall of proud Troy merely a matter of time.

The world is such a place. There is no doubt of it. It is not the ruins of Troy that crown our history, nothing so tragic, nor so dignified. Our ultimate inheritance and our true deserts, if we are the kind of audience that thinks Troilus a poor fool and Hector as poor a fool, are the legacy of Pandarus:

> Some two months hence my will shall here be made . . .
> Till then I'll sweat and seek about for eases,
> And at that time bequeath you my diseases.

These are the final lines of the play, and there is no mistaking their direct assault on all who ply Pandarus's trade, not merely egging a noble Troilus on to feats of lust they have no capacity to perform themselves, but comfortably applauding the magnanimity which they would think themselves fools to emulate; hissing a Cressida who is the mirror of themselves; and hating Achilles for

behaving as they would.

It is because of this that the play is 'unpleasant'. It galls us where we are tenderest, yet, ordinarily, least sensitive. The tenderness comes as harness-sores do, from too much rubbing at calloused spots (on our conscience). Only two kinds of mind could encounter this play in unruffled calm: the completely stupid, unable to perceive its many satirical thrusts, and the utterly wise, the Ulyssean. This does not mean that the play is a bad one. Far from it. Since few of us are comparable in mental stature with Shakespeare's Ulysses, it merely means that the play is far greater than ordinary minds can guess.

Perhaps it was for this reason that Shakespeare included in his fine, resounding Prologue, the diffident remark:

> and hither am I come
> A prologue arm'd, but not in confidence
> Of author's pen or actor's voice.

Diffidence is a convention in such prologues. The author who is so temerarious as to demand his audience's applause invites cat-calls; but an author who knows that only an audience of Ulyssean calibre could be relied on to catch his drift, and not resent it, must be quite sincere in his doubts about the reception of his play by any ordinary audience.

Even so, neither the Prologue nor the Epilogue is a particularly humble affair. The first ends on a curt, arrogant note which should remind us that our judgment is not necessarily the last word, and that popularity is no measure of artistic achievement:

> Like, or find fault; do as your pleasures are:
> Now good or bad, 'tis but the chance of war.

The second ends with a positive insult, directed at "some galled goose of Winchester" ostensibly, but at the society which makes whoring profitable, in effect. It is insult enough that Pandarus should have been chosen to speak the Epilogue; one does not, if one wishes to compliment one's clients, select that most disreputable character in one's retinue to bid them farewell. Had Shakespeare intended a comic or objectively satirical effect the obvious choice for the Epilogue would have been Thersites. Had he intended a meditative close, Ulysses and no other should have been chosen. But no. Pandarus says the lines, and what he has to say is based on the assumption (natural enough to Pandarus, but not without its indications of what his author felt) that a goodly part of his audience is made up of panders or of the wares in

which panders deal. It is as if Shakespeare, anticipating the resentment his play would arouse in commonplace minds, had taken care to tell these same minds exactly what they are worth, and what their opinions are worth.

Well, we are all commonplace to some extent; and I am not sure that it is good for us to come away from every form of entertainment either purring with content or sighing with that extension of emotion which some believe to be the chief *raison d'être* of art. Indeed, in the very act of identifying ourselves with the passions, fulfilments, and frustrations of dramatic figments we often swamp parts of our mind that should be kept clear of emotion or dilute the very passions we ought to concentrate and distil, if we ourselves are honest in our desire for fulfilment. In shrugging off the tedium of our own lives we are never much to blame; but in enduring this tedium, and in taking care to cultivate our passions only by proxy — the passions which rightly used would rescue us — only by watching others in the throes of passion, we are not much to be commended. Those who come to art, and especially to the theatre, for the purpose of forgetting life are panders to all that is cowardly, lazy, and corrupt in them; and which of us is not a coward, an idler, and a degenerate in some small (no, in some *major)* part of himself? It is not that we fail to be saints, for of course we fail all along the line in that direction. Most of us fail, too, even in being satisfactorily animal or consistently human; and the reason is that we are so ready to let others live our lives for us, and so often more than ready to let others lose part of their lives for us.

This corruption in us becomes clear whenever anything untoward happens in any commonplace environment. The street accident or individual disaster which should evoke from passers-by instant and unembarrassing help, usually attracts an enormous crowd of spectators, all grateful for the opportunity to be seeing a 'bit of life', few alive enough to be anything but a nuisance. It is clear, too, on a small scale, to teachers when their pupils absorb but make no effort to digest, take but never give, are in every way passive, and in no way wholesomely active, about what they are supposed to 'study'. And it must have been clear, on a forbiddingly gigantic scale, to Shakespeare.

The Elizabethan audiences were probably far more discriminating than the average audience of our own day; yet, if they were human at all, they must often have offended Shakespeare

by their applause of just such bad art as Hamlet castigates, and the offence went (as it did in Hamlet's case) 'to the soul'. Audiences that applaud (in Shakespeare's day and our own) passions torn to tatters and the clowning interpolation of lines that are 'not set down' are, while they so applaud, congregations of panders, grateful for any cue to release their emotions, incapable of grappling with a genuine passion. *Troilus and Cressida* viewed in this light, is an instance of Shakespeare's vengeance on such audiences.

Even if it isn't, it is certainly satirical in intention and sardonic in tone. It belongs to a kind of art which defies Ricardsian analysis, and since this kind of art is very great indeed, it is clear that Richards's principles and practice of criticism, admirable as they are, are a long way from being absolutely dependable. Richards's insistence that an artist's tone should presuppose an intelligent audience cannot by any sophistry be applied to such things as Pandarus's final speech. This is true whether the audience in the theatre itself is taken as the ultimate recipient or whether some intelligent mind, watching the poetry *and* its effect on the audience, is so taken. *Troilus and Cressida,* like the best satire of Swift or Aristophanes, finds its target in either case, and strikes with deadly force. It is offensive, it is insulting, it is decidedly unpleasant; it castigates the audience or pulls the aloof critic up from his academic throne by the roots of his hair, and forces both to realize how far they are from being Troiluses or Hectors, how remote from the wisdom of Ulysses, and how nauseatingly close to Cressida and her uncle, to Achilles, and even to Thersites.

Tragedy of this kind makes man as a whole the sufferer, and the sum total of human frailty the *hamartia.* It is not a lesser kind than that which Aristotle described; it is merely different. Unless one accepts the incorrigibly stupid notion that satire is an inferior form of art (and that therefore your Polonius is, at his dullest, superior to Hamlet at his brightest, and Thomas Gray a greater artist than Swift or Cervantes), *Troilus and Cressida* must rank as a great play.

The best proof of this is in its diction. Judge this by any standard you please, except the standards of 'Lawn Tennyson' or Hollywood notions of the 'poetic', and you will find it flawless. It has power when it needs power; rhythm, sonorousness, and majesty when such things are appropriate; vivacity, naturalness,

clarity, and economy. Economy it has *in excelsis.* There is no line in the play which does not contribute to its final effect; none which can be omitted; none which does not richly serve a functional purpose. Never was a critic more mistaken than Hazlitt when he called this play "loose and desultory".

Usually the Prologue and Epilogue are excrescences. They are certainly not so in *Troilus and Cressida.* They initiate and clinch the satirical intent.

The first scene shows the cause of Troilus's inaction against the enemy; it is balanced by an antiphonal scene in the third Act when we are shown the cause of Achilles's inaction. Troilus is paralysed by the *weltschmerz* that accompanies frustrated passion; Achilles by his overweening pride: "The elephant hath joints, but none for courtesy". Whatever Troilus says before his brief hour of contentment is heavy with a sense of the futility of human effort, and with self-loathing. "Fools on both sides" he says, when bugles interrupt his one-sided chaffering with Pandarus; and when Aeneas asks him why he is not afield, he grunts "Because not there", and is immediately ashamed of himself:

> this woman's answer sorts,
> For womanish it is to be from thence.

His dealings with Pandarus are one-sided because Pandarus knows he holds the master hand, pretends to be reluctant to serve so impatient a fellow, but does his best to whip up this impatience:

> . . . she looked yesternight fairer than ever I saw her look, or any woman else, ... An her hair were not somewhat darker than Helen's—well, go to. . . . I would somebody had heard her talk yesterday as I did. I will not dispraise your sister Cassandra's wit, but—

Prettier than Helen, wittier than Cassandra . . . The fellow spares no pains to torture Troilus; he revels in the sensual delight such people have at seeing a real man writhing at the thrusts of his own masculinity. The scene ends on a note which is the key to the wry humour of the rest of the play: Troilus, hearing that Paris has been wounded by the cuckolded Menelaus, says,

> Let Paris bleed: 'tis but a scar to scorn;
> Paris is gored with Menelaus' horn.

A rough joke, a crude and lewd one, yet still concerned with questions of masculine 'honour'; it does not sink to the level of Pandarus's humour.

In the next scene Pandarus himself is made to seem something

of a simpleton beside the 'angel' Cressida. She heaves unashamed sighs at the mention of handsome men, Hector, Helenus, Achilles, and the rest, in much the manner of a shopgirl growing wistful about film-stars; but she hasn't the innocence of the shopgirl. To Pandarus's reconstruction of bits of dialogue that he claims (with evident falsehood) to have passed between Troilus and Helen, she replies with ready contempt, somewhat too ready. In her present wit one sees the future shrew and worse; for Pandarus's own anticipations of lechery by proxy are more than matched by her jokes about a more direct kind of fornication:

> If I cannot ward what I would not have hit, I
> can watch you for telling how I took the blow;
> unless it swell past hiding, and then it's past
> watching.

In modern English this would be, 'If I can't manage to guard what I don't want to be reached, I can depend on you to tell everyone all about how the fellow concerned got past my guard; unless I get very pregnant, when everyone will be able to see for himself.' The Elizabethans were less mealy-mouthed than we are about such things, but not even the Elizabethans expected this kind of joke from anyone under the status of a professional.

Yet Pandarus is more cunning (or Shakespeare more skilful) than is immediately apparent. Cressida's contempt for his tall talk about Troilus is like the pertness of a little girl who refuses the 'nice cake' you are offering her, and rejects your blandishments, but means to have it all the same, and no thanks to you. He knows how to whet Cressida's appetite, and is willing to seem every kind of fool in the process—so long as his talk gets home.

The diction in the first two scenes is at least as lively as that of the liveliest Restoration comedies, considerably more natural than that of the best epigrammatic comedies of our own era, with hints of tragedy too obvious to need analysis and touches of farce that the hasty reader, or the incompetent producer, may miss. Visualize the scene after the great Trojans have passed (each, no doubt, a 'star' in Shakespeare's day) and then watch the shambling and stumbling across the stage of a kite's tail of 'supers' in the guise of 'common soldiers'. It takes years of practice before anyone learns to walk across the stage with any dignity that isn't laughable or any ease that doesn't seem loose-jointed or epileptic. Every troupe of actors has its novices, and these must often have been a thorn in Shakespeare's side. At one stroke he gets his own

back on some four or five 'hams' in a very raw state of curing, and reveals the whole extent of Pandarus's philosophy:

> "Asses", snorts Pandarus, as the first super hobbles into view; and then "fools, dolts! chaff and bran, chaff and bran! porridge after meat!" (There must have been a linked couple of the poor fools to extort that "chaff and bran!")

In the very act of laughing, however, one sees that in Pandarus's eyes men (and women) are merely dishes of meat; he offers Troilus to Cressida as if he were offering a savoury joint; and offers Cressida to Troilus as if the metaphor about girls being cutlets had some substance in fact. And he knows enough about the mechanisms of both kinds of animal to realize that in this, as in flattery, there is almost no limit to what one can with impunity lay on. Put on what airs she pleases, Cressida is as inexorably hooked as Troilus.

The next scene raises the diction to a pitch of dignity which at first seems well suited to the great Greek captains; and so it is; altogether too well suited, as we discover when Ulysses (to get them to let him have his way about Achilles) tells them about Patroclus and Achilles's favourite amusement: the guying of the very dignity which the first part of the scene is so careful to stress. At the same time, Shakespeare, no doubt relishing his adroit castigation of those wretched 'supers' now gets in a shrewd stroke or two at the 'stars':

> Sometime, great Agamemnon,
> Thy topless deputation he puts on:
> And *like a strutting player, whose conceit*
> *Lies in his hamstring* . . . . . .
> He acts thy greatness in; . . . At this fusty stuff
> The large Achilles, on his press'd bed lolling,
> From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause;
> Cries 'Excellent' 'tis Agamemnon just.
> Now play me Nestor; . . .

In this terrible play the higher men are raised, the harder they fall, and their fall splashes everyone within range. Here Ulysses is preparing to take Achilles down a peg or two, and his preparation involves a sidelong assault at the dignity of the other captains and kings; at the same time the very actors on the stage are being guyed; and all the time it is the audience, the reader, on whom the full fury of the satire descends, for who is proof against the glamour of accomplished mummers, and how can one guard

against the mood of deep respect for these Greek captains which the scene induces, and how avoid the deflation and the glimpse into our own false dignities with which the scene ends ?

Achilles, though he does not appear, is the chief topic of the third scene. He and Ajax have been discussed with some emphasis in the second. The fourth scene of the play (Act II Scene I) brings in these two, and with them the play's major interpreter, Thersites. We have met Ulysses in all his wisdom; we have met Troilus, Cressida and Pandarus; each has displayed the major strands of his character, and each has been woven into the coil that is the play; soon Hector is to appear, and the great many-stranded cable which makes the lash of the whip is complete. If, as Hazlitt says, there are "loose ends" to it, they are loose only in the sense that the thongs of a cat-o'-nine-tails are loose, the better to reinforce the unitary, the indivisible blow.

The second scene of Act II, in which Priam discusses Nestor's offer to withdraw if Helen is given up, achieves the dignity begun, but not sustained, by the scene in which the Greeks discuss the defection of Achilles. The question of 'honour' is discussed with grave and philosophic impartiality. Cassandra's prophecy of woe disturbs the Trojan knights collectively no more than her later warning deters Hector. This scene is the complement to the scene which first shows us the great Ulysses; it is the Trojan side of the trouble; and it gives us our first detailed view of Hector. Cassandra's part in it is an anticipation of Act Five, where Hector is again warned not to pursue his plan of challenging the Greeks.

Then in separate scenes, each complementary to a scene that has gone before, and each anticipating a scene to come, come the 'promotion' of Ajax (and the taunting of Achilles); the performance of Pandarus before those noted lovers, Helen and Paris (his song is the archetype of all croonings:

> Love, love, nothing but love, still more !
> For, O . . .
> These lovers crie Oh, Oh ! they die !
> Yet that which seems the wound to kill,
> Doth turn oh ! oh ! to ha ! ha ! he !
> So dying love lives still:
> Oh ! oh ! a while, but ha ! ha ! ha !
> Oh ! oh ! groans out for ha ! ha ! ha !).

Then comes the scene in which Pandarus's song, as sung by Troilus and Cressida, is embodied in action; the proposal by the

traitor Calchas which leads to the exchange of Cressida for Antenor; the scene in which Achilles is shaken in his self-confidence by the crafty Ulysses; the heart-to-heart talk in which Paris asks Diomedes how he compares with Menelaus, and has Helen cheapened for his pains; the scene which puts an end to the bliss of Troilus and Cressida; their farewells and passionate promises; the parleying and high courtesy that ensues between the Greeks and Trojans when Cressida is delivered and Antenor given up; Cressida's too glowing reception of Greek compliments; and so on to the bitter end in which high chivalry is brought low by a man's malice and a woman's lechery.

Perhaps it is the brilliance of the individual speeches which makes it so difficult to see the essential unity of this play. Hazlitt calls Ulysses's speech about "degree" a "lofty example of didactic eloquence". Dover-Wilson uses it as evidence that Shakespeare and other Elizabethans were mentally imprisoned in superstitions about the 'influence' of the stars. Caroline Spurgeon makes it a quarry for her curious thesis that Shakespeare's images tended, like pimples, to have different contents at different stages of his growth. At the stage when Ulysses's great speech was written, it seems, Shakespeare was fascinated by meteorological and astronomical images. There may be something in this theory. If so, it doesn't explain why Romeo, an earlier product, uses the same kind of imagery, or why Prospero, a later one, doesn't depart from this kind.

What few critics have noticed is the most obvious thing in the speech: its dramatic function. It is a speech on discipline. It is Ulysses's difficult task to impose this discipline, not on the rank and file, but on the very generals. Anyone who knows anything about armies would quail before such a prospect. Ulysses does not quail. He talks at such length and to such effect that by the time he has done the conduct of the war is virtually in his hands, and the regeneration of the contentious and disaffected Greek army, with its many internecine quarrels, has begun. This is a great deal for a single speech to achieve. To make it dramatically convincing Ulysses has to talk profoundly. What he has to say about the need for discipline in armies, and for 'order in the conduct of the spheres and the seasons', is so well said that it raises the attention out of the sphere of drama into that of the highest contemplative poetry; and critics, lost in contemplation, forget the intended effect of the speech on the Greek brass-hats.

Critics ought to have an intellect of tougher mettle than that of the military brass-hat. There is some excuse for their succumbing in this instance, but *their* weakness is not Shakespeare's. Nothing can excuse the vilifying of a great play on the grounds that the average reader is not 'up to' it.

The same mistake has been made about the great speech,

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion:
> A great siz'd monster of ingratitudes:
> Those scraps are good deeds past,
> Which are devoured as fast as they are made,
> Forgot as soon as done. Persev'rance, dear my lord,
> Keeps Honour bright . . .

and so on for thirty wonderful lines. It is all so true, so illuminating, so utterly wise, that, reading or hearing it, we can hardly help taking it to ourselves and forgetting that it was meant to sway the sullen Achilles out of his proud inaction. This, eventually, it does, but not with any ludicrous suddenness (such as vitiates the action of many a silly modern play). The force of this speech, so far as the play is concerned, is not fully seen until Achilles, to keep his honour 'bright', kills Hector in the most dishonourable way. A delayed-action master-stroke of this kind is not perceptible to all; but this, too, is no excuse for complaining of the play's lack of direction. What the play has really lacked is adequate understanding.

In his essay on *Troilus and Cressida* Hazlitt complains of the "heaped measure, running over" with which Shakespeare's diction presents us. "This", he says, "is his greatest fault". If Shakespeare's heaped measure is a fault in ordinary eyes, no wonder the world is as corrupt as *Troilus and Cressida* accuses it of being. One longs for a world riddled with such 'faults'.

'Pleasant' or 'unpleasant', this play has a joy on every page for the discriminating ear. Forget analysis, forget preoccupation with moral 'values', forget the whole sawdust mountain of academics, and let your mind revel in the succession of great phrases the play sets rolling:

> But I am weaker than a woman's tear . . . skilless as unpractised infancy. . . . He that will have a cake out of wheat must needs tarry the grinding. . . . Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart Her eyes. . . . Her hand, in whose comparison all whites are ink. . . . 'Tis but a

> scar to scorn. . . . He hath the joints of everything; but everything so out of joint. . . . I had as lief Helen's golden tongue had commended Troilus for a copper nose. . . . Women are angels, wooing. . . . Things won are done. . . . Distinction with a broad and powerful fan, Puffing at all, winnows the light away. . . . And make a sop of all this solid globe . . .

How rich and varied it is: Troilus's passion, Cressida's laughter, Pandarus's wheedling, the roaring of the captains, the music, wit and oracle of Ulysses, the barking of Thersites, Cassandra's ominous cries, Hector's brief appeal when death confronts him ("Forego this vantage, Greek!"), Troilus's final and most bitter vow, and the grace-notes from such as Helen and Patroclus. Shakespeare never committed himself to his characters and it is foolish to look for him in them, even in so rich and varied a character as Hamlet; but we have every right to identify him with this many-voiced music. If, in this instance, it is woven about a bitter theme, and if it is true that Shakespeare was not quite himself when he wrote it (which I deny), whatever defects may lurk in the play (and I can see none) should be weighed against this music and

> Like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
> Be shook to air.

NOTE:

The Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English, held in Johannesburg 10-12 July, 1956, are available in printed form from the publishers, The Witwatersrand University Press. The price to the public is 10/-, but a 10 per cent. rebate is allowed to delegates to the Conference.

EXAMINATIONS IN ENGLISH

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

The contributors to this symposium, Professor G. H. Durrant and Mr L. T. Bennett, were asked for views on the question: "Does the present University examination system adequately test (a) English Scholarship, (b) Critical Intelligence, and (c) Capacity for Creative Writing?"
Correspondence is invited on this theme.

I

G. H. DURRANT

THE present University examination system is of course not everywhere the same, even within the field of English studies in South Africa. But in general, University examinations in English consist of a number of three-hour 'papers' for the most part made up of 'essay-type' questions, of which the candidate is expected to answer from three to five in the time at his disposal.

This system was thoroughly discussed at the Conference of University Teachers of English in Pietermaritzburg in 1949, and what I have to say in what follows is based upon what was said by speakers at that conference, and especially upon the contribution made by Professor Alan Warner. In the University of Natal, as in other Departments of English, we have gradually revised our system of examination during the past ten years, and have adopted in particular the principle of testing the candidate's knowledge of literature by questions directed to passages from the texts rather than by means of 'essay-type' questions.

'Essay-type' Questions

The arguments for the scrutiny-of-passage method were fully developed at the Conference in 1949; they convinced me at the time, and some years of experience with textual questions have strengthened my conviction. 'Essay-type' questions have grave defects. If there are enough of them in the examination to cover

the field of study, the candidate has far too little time to display thorough knowledge and detailed understanding of any work. The answers must be written at great speed, and the standard of composition is usually very low. Above all, the essay-type question deals by its very nature in broad general ideas; it offers the best chances to an intelligent student who has an 'original' idea, and it is disadvantageous to the well-read and really discriminating student, whose sense of the complexity of any serious work of literature makes him hesitate to commit himself to striking general statements.

Textual Questions

There is of course an opposite danger in the use of textual questions. Unless the questions appended to the passage from the text are well framed, the candidate may be offered no choice but to follow the general line of thinking laid down for him by the examiner. The textual question, in other words, may easily lead down the fatally easy slope to the underworld of the 'short-answer' question so much beloved of educational statisticians—a type of question in which the examiner determines beforehand not only what questions the candidate shall answer, but also what his answers ought to be. (This kind of question is sometimes called 'objective'; the truth is of course that the subjective element is transferred from the act of marking to the act of setting the paper and deciding on the appropriate answer.)

'Short-answer' Questions

There are many reasons why the short-answer question is usually unacceptable to teachers of literature. The chief of these, to my mind, is the imposition upon the candidate of a rigid conception of a 'right' and 'wrong' answer; such questions give no scope for a candidate who has something to say on the subject which the examiner himself has not foreseen. Yet every experienced examiner in literature knows that the best candidates, every year, have something to say that is new to him, and that strikes him as true and illuminating. This, indeed, is the way in which really good candidates make their quality apparent.

I should therefore flatly reject the textual question if it were conceived of as a 'short-answer' question. But it is possible to frame questions on particular passages in such a way as to give the fullest scope for the candidate's own original perceptions. This may be done by requiring an evaluation of the part in terms of

the whole work, and by inviting the candidate to add any critical observations of his own, independently of any specific questions that have been asked. One liberty alone should be denied to the candidate — that of writing generally from books-about-the-author. The textual question requires the candidate to write about a particular literary passage; if the study of critical and biographical works has, in fact, been profitably pursued, it will reveal itself concretely in the answer to particular questions. The best test of scholarship, in short, is a test of the actual skill attained in reading and understanding; and the chief defect of the essay-type question is that it can often be better answered from a book-about-literature than from a first-hand study of literature itself.

Critical Intelligence

As for the testing of critical intelligence, this seems to me to be much more effectively tested by this method than by 'essay-type' questions, where the candidate can largely choose his own ground, and can easily pass off the acquired opinions of others, reproduced in general terms. The textual question compels immediate and particular judgments of passages both 'seen' and 'unseen'. Nor should it be supposed that it tests understanding of the part to the neglect of the whole, for a scene (or a part of a scene) from Shakespeare can be profitably discussed in detail only in relationship to the play as a whole. The same is, of course, true of any organically conceived work of literature. The criticism sometimes offered that textual passages lead to scrappiness of mind is, I believe, very wide of the mark.

The Essay-Paper

In place of the numerous brief essay-questions, we now have in Natal, in addition to the textual questions, one substantial essay. The candidate has two or three hours in which to plan and write it, and a good choice of questions of a general literary nature. This I believe to be a better test of a candidate's powers of composition than are the hurriedly written little essays of the papers we had in the past. Moreover, the existence of an essay paper helps to remind students of the importance of good composition; for, with all its defects, nobody will deny that the examination system exercises a powerful influence on the attitudes of students.

Creative Writing

I no longer believe that there is any use in attempting to

encourage or to teach creative writing. I have never believed that there was any point in trying to examine in it. The essence of creative writing is that it is the product of an original mode of thought. If it is not newly thought in a new mould it is not 'creative', but merely a passable imitation of creative writing. In a sense, of course, every paragraph that is written, and certainly every essay, is a creative act. But the term 'creative writing' is generally understood to mean, not the creation of valid critical comment, but the production of poetry, plays, stories, and novels. Such creative ability is a rare gift of the gods. Those who have it will not be in need of help from professors (though they may benefit by private encouragement from any person whose opinion they value). Nor can we, without making ourselves ridiculous, teach an art which we ourselves are not competent in. If we really know how to write novels and plays, why do we not do so, instead of setting up as teachers of the art? A teacher of literature may be expected to know how to read, study, and help others to understand. He does not know how to make literature, or he would not give his attention to the secondary activity of criticism and teaching. And creative writing, to be of any value, needs the full devotion of a lifetime.

Above all, we should recognize our own limitations as critics. Although we may with diligent study make ourselves competent judges of the literature of the past, and helpful interpreters of the literature of the present, we can scarcely claim to be able to decide with any authority the value of the literary productions of the young. Of course we take part in discussion with other readers of any work that is produced, and in this discussion we may be helpful. But to criticize and discuss is a very different matter from the formal academic adjudication of literary works. In such matters the academic mind is almost always wrong. Most original poets, let us say it with regret, have had to make their reputation in spite of academic opposition or academic indifference; and this was as true of Shakespeare as of T. S. Eliot. Teaching and examining in 'creative writing' should be left to schools of journalism. They at least know quite precisely what kind of literature they want their pupils to create; that indeed is the guarantee of its badness.

Advice to Young Writers

I suppose that most teachers of literature are asked to give

their opinion of poems and stories written by their students and by others. This is one of the few miseries of the profession. I find that the example of Horace is useful. Nobody ever suffered much harm from being told to put his verses away for nine years and then to re-read them; even the writer's vanity is not much wounded. And on the whole the discouragement of literary effervescence seems to be the most useful activity a teacher can undertake in this field.

To sum up. Examinations in literature are an evil, but a necessary evil. They are an evil because the true understanding of literature comes only with a disinterested delight in the reading of books, and the examination continually threatens that disinterested delight. But they are necessary because the teacher and student must live in society as it exists, and to abolish examinations in literature would at present mean the squeezing out of literary studies from schools and universities. The examination system ought to be reasonably stable, for the sake of fairness, and because any system has to be thoroughly tried out if it is to work reasonably well. But at the same time, examinations in literature ought not to become static; they need continual criticism and revision. They are important not only as a means of measuring achievement and of classifying students, but, above all, as a stimulus and a guide to study. The syllabus will in general (human nature being what it is) be studied in the spirit in which the examination papers of past years have been set. It is, in the end, upon the quality of the papers set, rather than upon their form that the quality of study depends. I cannot say that our examinations in literature in general adequately test English scholarship or critical ability; but I believe that improvements are being steadily made. I do not think that any examination tests 'creative ability'; and I am glad that this is so.

II

L. T. BENNETT

The modern approach to the study of language is a product of the philosophical and intellectual temper of the age. In the world of science the latter has produced automation and the new discipline of cybernetics. The less reprehensible attributes of human beings are built into machines so that we have automata whose behaviour is predictable and subject to control. Language has also been the subject of analysis in regard to form and

meaning, and the result has been the new disciplines of structural linguistics and semantics, which are interrelated. It is claimed that the latter ensure a measure of 'control' over language and an understanding of its mechanics.

Semantics has had a most salutary effect on language. But the analytical approach of the Richards and Leavis schools is largely a reaction to the somewhat subjective, uncritical approach of the past. A healthy readjustment in our attitudes to certain writers and their works has taken place and much literary dead-wood has been pruned away. In spite of Leavis's assertions to the contrary, students acquire a technique for the examination of a literary work. I believe it to be of great assistance to them in the assessment of works they have yet to read. There is great penetration in depth, a meticulous examination of the multi-layered complexities of a poem, and a corresponding improvement in the student's critical faculties. He begins to have a few glimmerings of what is meant by 'scholarship'.

While the general result has been salutary, this exhaustive analytical treatment of literary works may induce a certain sterility of outlook. A poem may be dissected and eviscerated until it is resolved into its ultimate components. But is the whole a sum of its parts? Does the student really get to the essence of the poem? One remembers the tribulations suffered by Dylan Thomas at the hands of would-be analysts, who had no hesitation in assigning meanings to his poems when the poet himself had long forgotten what they meant. The imponderables remain. There remains the quintessence which lies beyond all analysis, the mystery in the skin of a poem or in a piece of music, in the arcana of simplicity, in the felicities of Bird and Purcell, of Herrick and Blake, in the complex orchestration of Browning and Dylan Thomas. And these can at best be revealed intuitively, through the subtleties of intonation, through all the infinite suggestion of a well-used voice. The elusive overtones of meaning which lie behind rhythm and tonal pattern emerge, as they do in Dylan Thomas's readings. "Poetry is made with words, not with ideas", as Mallarme wrote to Degas (quoted by Ronald Bottrall in a recent article). "English poetic rhythms are notoriously elusive". The student's emotional faculty is engaged and his whole being is stirred. The poem has captured the whole man, not only his intellect. Communication is almost complete. It is this fusion of emotion and intellect that produces those elements

which result in our spiritual enrichment. Unfortunately very few of us are capable of making a poem speak without being self-conscious ourselves or engendering self-consciousness in our audience. But a disciplined attempt should be made. At all costs the Anglo-Saxon tradition of "letting a poem speak for itself" should be abandoned. A dreary, arid, well-bred rendering of a poem in the flat tones of a Girton don or of a Cheltenham Sixth-Form mistress, in one of her more pallid moments, is hardly calculated to summon up the blood. The "mechanical conversion of *Hamlet* into philogical mincemeat" is not enough.

The pronouncement made in some quarters in England and on the Continent that we study the poem and the poem only, that nothing outside the bare words of the poem is to be allowed to enter into our assessment of it, I find a trifle hard to accept. To exclude such elements as the occasion, relevant biographical details, the literary conventions, the social habits and attitudes of mind of the day, does not seem to make sense. What sense can then be made of Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot,* of Lamb's *Dream Children,* of *Kubla Khan*? The danger of importing elements into the poem that are not really there is a possible danger, but one that has been overestimated. The final stage is reached in a well-known American critic who maintains in an excess of exegetical zeal that the critic "creates" the poem. There is thus a real danger that the analysis of a poem might be regarded as more important than the poem analysed.

You will ask why we must ponder the imponderables. Surely, by implication, a fruitless task? I have been making a few enquiries of post-graduate students. The consensus seems to be that "the critical procedure tends to overwhelm and stifle young writers or to turn them into half-baked critics, armed with a critical apparatus instead of perception, theories instead of experience". There is penetration in depth, but over how wide an area? Can we understand a poem unless we see it against a background of a great many other poems? A very considerable background of general reading is necessary for true understanding.

If the approach to literature is almost exclusively analytical, there is some danger that the creative faculties of some of the best students may be inhibited. It is the good student who becomes truly aware of the complexities of the best poetry. He becomes appalled at the difficulty of his task and feels that to write anything at all — especially in English — is a presumption. His

imagination congeals in the cold fat of inhibition. Perhaps this is a good thing in many cases. But is not an attempt at writing poetry the best way to learn what the soaring flight of inspiration and genius really mean? Is there a better way to induce a sense of humility and a truer perspective in the mind of a student?

I am not suggesting that to the agonies and glories of teaching English there should be added the martyrdom of examining countless callow effusions from immature students, many of whom have read next to nothing and who have the sensitivity of a strip-tease artist. Students who have been questioned on this point maintain that "overt staff encouragement is rare", but no blame is assigned to lecturers as a result. It was felt that such "encouragement" might have a more blighting effect than complete neglect, and "would thoroughly squelch any originality". A complex picture indeed. What is the solution? A Newdigate Prize? Much depends on the intellectual, moral and emotional temper of the university concerned, and in this respect there is a very wide diversity in South Africa. But where there is an intellectual ferment, the thrust-and-parry of polemics, where the texture of the student's life has woven into it such elements as ballet, painting, music, sculpture and the study of other languages, there will surely be a sufficient stimulus. Creative writing comes from life, not from books, from the firing of events in the furnace of imagination. I hope we are not losing some of our potential writers for the lack of a little encouragement at the right time. How are we to determine the capacity of a student for creative writing unless we afford him the opportunity? If we consider the number of students passing through our universities, it must be admitted that the harvest in creative effort is meagre indeed. At the same time I am fully aware that writers do not grow under every bush.

What is the position in the high school? How many teachers are genuinely interested in creative writing? The present predilection for bigger and better high schools, the crowded classrooms, the somewhat diversified range of ability to be found in the senior classes, the emphasis on the more utilitarian requirements of the matriculation examination, the fact that quite a large proportion of teachers are not English-speaking, and the dearth of scholarship in the teaching profession, are factors which operate against a personal and intimate relationship between scholar and teacher. In addition, the school course is much too short. The

introduction of a Sixth Form, where a teacher would have time to devote his energies to a small group for a period of two years, with the knowledge that they were proceeding to a university, would do much to improve the situation. It is hoped that the new policy of differentiated education will help to weed out those who are not likely to profit from university instruction and to enable the teacher in the matriculation class to raise his standard to something approaching pre-university level. An examination of the scripts submitted for the matriculation examination reveals more than a modicum of creative ability in the candidates, but the emphasis in the paper remains on the analytical aspects of language study. 'Scholarship' is not adequately tested (Questions on literature are largely of the diagnostic type, while the type of essay set often fails to elicit creative writing). The influence of the examination on the work done in the schools is only too well known. As a result I doubt whether much creative writing is done in our schools.

It is, nevertheless, the business of a university department to foster creative writing. In the case of most students this will take the form merely of developing the student's ability to express himself adequately. In the case of the few it will be one of nurturing latent talent, which may later make a significant contribution. These two types should not be confused. If any testing is done — and I am dubious as to whether it is desirable or not — only the first type should be tested.

What of scholarship at the university? I am sure that no one will claim that scholarship in the strictest sense of the word can be acquired in the short period of three years. Occasionally there will be a gifted student who has had the advantage of coming from a cultured home and who may have the rudiments of scholarship. The discrepancies between the universities in regard to the level of scholarship attained can only be described as startling. Those post-graduate students whom I consulted — and there were some outstanding students amongst them from a number of universities — were of the opinion that the examinations tested the student's memory rather than his capacity. They had very few practical suggestions to offer. One of them did suggest a viva voce examination, followed by a written examination, and a long essay requiring research, original thinking and intensive reading. The marks for the latter were to be loaded so that it would exercise a preponderant influence in deciding whether a student passed or not.

To test English scholarship would mean to test the student on an experience and knowledge of an extremely wide range of literature, rather wider than can be acquired in three years at a university. If, however, the meaning of the term 'English scholarship' is restricted to what a really competent student can acquire under the most favourable conditions, then I feel that what is taught is adequately tested. The problem, as I have indicated above, is not so much how to test as what is taught.

In regard to critical intelligence, I feel that the over-riding importance attached to the analytical approach to literature will ensure that this aspect is thoroughly tested. I have no misgivings on this score. On the contrary, I am of the opinion that too much time is spent on developing the student's critical intelligence.

The chief aim of literary criticism is aesthetic judgment, the product of a multiplicity of individual experiences, judgments, comparisons. When it comes to scholarship, the key word is 'multiplicity'. It is the range and depth of reading with which we are concerned, especially if literature is "the history of a nation's verbal imagination". Scholarship is compounded of such elements as intellectual and emotional discrimination, the *Zeitgeist,* an awareness of the social attitude and conventions of each era, their literary traditions and a considerable verbal discrimination in assessing the work of a given period. "The student must read widely as well as intensively, and exercise in a larger field the eye for significant detail and pattern, the sense of verbal energy and control. From the microcosm he must move to the macrocosm."

Scholarship will thus depend on two things — the content of the course and the approach to it. If we accept the content of the course — and this might form the subject of a subsequent enquiry — then the testing of this content, I feel, is more than adequate. But it would be presumptuous of me to form any opinions on that score.

Must we not pause to examine what our objectives really are? Literature is merely an aspect of language, even if it is the most important one. We examine meticulously the structure of a poem. Do our students know anything about the structure of the language of which literature is merely an aspect? Does the study of literature subsist in a vacuum? Must a student leave the university without any knowledge of the structure of the language itself?

We can only discuss how to examine after we have determined what we wish to examine. What are our objectives? I feel that they are twofold. There is the matter of content and the matter of skills. They are mutually interdependent. I think a student needs to form an acquaintance with as wide a range of English literature as possible through intensive and extensive reading. To do this he will have to develop his critical intelligence through the disciplined analysis of as many poems of different types as possible. He will also have to acquire quite an extensive knowledge of the way in which the English language functions, so as to break down the rather artificial barrier between literature and language. Until a pupil has acquired some knowledge of the structure of the language he cannot really understand how the language functions in prose or verse, as he has not acquired any knowledge of the conventions which govern its behaviour. In addition, the whole man must also acquire a more-than-adequate command of the spoken tongue. This is the *sine qua non*. What is the use of any study of the language if the student's speech is halting, ineffectual and laboured? Many opportunities exist for acquiring this skill, and it should certainly be borne in mind in assessing the candidate. It makes a viva examination imperative.

Finally, the ability to write the language with competence and ease should be a criterion not readily dismissed. For most students this will mean a skill to employ in the everyday affairs of life, but for the few the fostering of a talent that might make a significant contribution to our letters.

If we determine our objectives, the form of the examination will inevitably emerge. I have not the faintest doubt that they will be adequately tested.

THE ENGLISH SCHOOL AT OXFORD

C. O. GARDNER

OXFORD continues to be an important university because it has a rich tradition of learning and a prestige which ensures the continuance of the tradition. One cannot easily compare it with any institution in Africa.

In spite of the busy town which has grown up around it, the University itself remains—each of its colleges remains—a place of bells and old buildings and quiet lawns. There are large libraries, and the town has many bookshops. Many of the professors and dons are authorities in their own branches of learning. Students are, on the whole, intelligent and well-read and are likely to have come to believe in their subjects before they arrive, for entrance examinations are rigorous.

It is not surprising, then, that standards of scholarship should be high, and that, at the same time, the students (who are allowed, and are capable of making the most of, a great amount of freedom) should be able to build up and to benefit from a remarkably varied communal life. In his study and in his sitting-room, with his tutors and with his friends, the student learns and is enriched: his convictions are constantly challenged, changed and broadened.

Oxford is a place of culture, of good fellowship, of humour: in many ways it is all that a student of literature could desire.

When the first European universities were founded, the majority of the scholars (partly because almost all of them were clerics) were at least nominally dedicated to the service of their fellow men. Moreover the university—the *studium*—soon came to take its respected place beside the *sacerdotium* and the *imperium,* the great powers which were, each in its way, to lead medieval man towards God.

Nowadays, however, with our advantage of a broader humanism and our great disadvantage of a crippling materialism, the traditional and all-important hierarchy of values is being disregarded. Although the universities are still looked up to, they are not deeply respected: a man is admired if, as a result of his studies, he qualifies for a well-paid job; science is acceptable (and indeed it is becoming the modern man's superstition); but the arts, the cornerstone of a university's work, are, it would often be said, pleasant and not really a man's job.

In this state of affairs, universities must be more aware than ever before of one aspect of their task: they must see themselves as, and they must truly come to be, centres of intelligence and perceptiveness, centres which spread their influence throughout the society in which they are placed. English departments especially must be intent upon educating not only their students but, ultimately, all those who are at the mercy of unscrupulous manipulators of words.

In South Africa (and it is probably the same throughout Africa), it is difficult for a lecturer or a valid student to be unaware of the responsibility which a university must bear.

England—that land of welfare and of popular newspapers and of television poles—is greatly in need of a vigorous intelligentsia which can give it a sense of direction; but Oxford, one of its major universities, is in some ways betraying it. The University remains uncannily aloof from the town. It retains its valuable intellectual life, but it does not seem to have adjusted itself fully to the urgent task of noticing and understanding the society which it is to educate. Certainly the faculty of English—in so far as it can be considered as a corporate entity—has not yet learned to reflect in its life the needs of the new, largely disenchanted life by which it is surrounded.

For this reason, the English School, for all its scholarly and intelligent dons, is in some ways disappointing. What may appear to be its lack of respect for the world-outside-the-university is to be seen in connection with (and perhaps it is a result of) its tendency to underestimate the value of literature. Many Oxford English dons seem not to take great literature completely seriously: it is not always regarded as something which by its very beauty leads the reader into new and important perceptions; the study of literature is at Oxford not normally considered to be dynamic, intensely valuable both for the student and for society, the modern equivalent (for surely it in many ways is) of the traditional study of the classics.

The essence of literature is its impact, its *meaning,* for unless it has a notable and enriching effect it can hardly be said to exist at all as literature. Yet, amongst English lecturers at Oxford, the meaning is too often taken for granted. Indeed it would perhaps be said that it is impossible to elucidate the living core of a poem or a play. What is more, literature is thought of by many dons as being, to a large extent, a discipline, an academic 'line'

in which one can become a scholar. Such an attitude leads, unfortunately, to the tendency to subordinate what is valuable in a work of literature to the (still of course important) facts of its historical background or of its linguistic significance, and indeed it has happened that Oxford men have taken refuge in historical background in their disagreements with 'advanced Cambridge critics' who, if they are at times unscholarly, have usually tried to keep their eyes clearly upon what has seemed to be the real point of the work under discussion. An over-scholarly approach may well result, also, in the belief that any work of literature, merely because it has been written, is worthy of detailed study. Moreover, even when literature is thought of as something which gives pleasure, it is often considered, at Oxford, to be merely delightful—like port. The specifically intellectual pleasure is not perceived or is disregarded; and this again leads to the dangerous refusal to concentrate attention upon meaning.

The pervading attitude which I have tried to describe must be seen as a part of the background to the study of English at Oxford. Certainly it is not a formulated philosophy, and it is not found always or to the same degree even in those lecturers who could be regarded as its most uncompromising exponents. Nor is a more vital approach to literature unheard of at Oxford; almost every don has his moments, and several of them (I think especially of W. W. Robson, Helen Gardner and F. W. Bateson) are great critics.

At Oxford, at the undergraduate level, the study of English (and indeed of every subject) is based upon the well-known system of the weekly tutorial. The student, sometimes together with another student, spends an hour with his tutor: he reads his week's essay aloud—or listens to his comrade's essay and hands his own in—and then there is a discussion. This personal supervision and the pace set by the necessity for frequent essays are very valuable. The success of the tutorial system, however, depends greatly upon the ability and the enthusiasm of the individual tutor. Almost all students seem to find their tutorials interesting, but not all dons are lively, and unfortunately it is difficult to change from one tutor to another. But a student is always given the chance of expressing himself fully in a tutorial.

Exceptionally good provision is made, then, for contact between master and student, but students are hardly encouraged to work together in groups, for discussion classes under the leader-

ship of dons are not very often arranged. This may be due to Oxford's reluctance to recognize the importance of 'practical criticism' as a test of a student's response to literature.

Each term there is a wide variety of lectures; but at Oxford students do not attend many lectures, and, as far as the English School is concerned (although it is difficult to generalize), this is not surprising. Lectures are scholarly and well thought out, but they seem often to lack that alert sensitivity without which the study of literature is in danger of becoming merely a branch of social history.

Examinations, dreaded everywhere, are more than usually dreaded at Oxford, for, after a fairly small examination at the end of the second term, there is no university examination until the huge final 'Schools' twenty-seven months later. (At the beginning of each term a student writes at least one 'collection', an informal examination which tests him on his vacation reading and which is set and marked by his tutor.) But this system allows a student to spend most of his time at the university unworried by important examinations. Moreover, standards are high (only about five per cent of the two hundred students who sit for English each year are awarded first classes), and it is excellent that every candidate should be given also a viva voce examination, even if it is often very brief.

The Honours English syllabus is curiously limited: unless a student decides to write an extra paper, he will study formally no literature that has been written since 1830. The belief that a student needs to *learn* to interpret the great writings of his day seems to be regarded as a modern fallacy. But I believe this anomaly is to be at least partly removed: a student may soon study any literature written before 1920. For the rest the syllabus is comprehensive: the six literature papers include questions on every writer of importance between Chaucer and Keats.

There are also three language papers. (I am talking throughout of the average English student: there are a few students each year who specialize in linguistics.) The emphasis placed upon the study of Old English, of Middle English and of the history of Modern English is in many ways admirable, and it ought to be noticed by English departments at other universities; each student has also a language tutor with whom, too, he spends an hour every week. Yet too often such great poems as *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are drowned — either by

lecturers or by tutors — in a welter of historical or philological comment, and many students come to regard the whole subject with hostility. It seems possible, however, that in the future more importance is to be attached to the study of early English writings *as literature*.

In the foreground, and more important than anything I have been describing, there is of course the Oxford student himself. He works hard and very largely on his own, reads widely, usually has a large number of friends (with whom he discusses everything), and comes to his own conclusions. He is by no means a simple prey to the ideas of his tutors or of the English School in general. Nevertheless, the attitudes of dons are influential, and I think it would be true to say that many students are either disappointed or almost demoralized by the English School's tendency to neglect what is most important in works of art. One of the results of this is that students seem often to leave the university without feeling that they have anything to give to the world.

But this is only a part of the picture. I have shown that English is studied, on the whole, very fully; in many ways a student is offered all that he could require. And indeed, paradoxically, there is much to be admired even in the tendencies I have found fault with. The Oxford way of life and thought is valuable especially for its mature stillness, its feeling for the past, its disarming good humour, its detachment. Yet, one may ask, if Age tries to dominate, what will Youth do?

THE WEIRD SISTERS IN MACBETH

M. D. W. JEFFREYS

Professor Bradley has so little understood Shakespeare's intent in the tragedy of *Macbeth,* has so little understood the *rôle* of the three fateful sisters, that he wrote: "There is not a syllable in *Macbeth* to imply that the three weird sisters are anything but women."[1] He holds, in other words, that the three weird sisters are just ordinary hum-drum witches, as known to the Elizabethans. As will be seen, Shakespeare does not open the "Royal Play" of *Macbeth* with such meagre and mundane figures. He opens on a cosmic scale, not on a parochial one.

The understanding of the play has appreciated since Bradley's day and one finds Dover Wilson calling the three weird sisters "the incarnation of evil in the Universe."[2] Such a description is an accurate summary of a witch; but illumination on the specific nature of the three weird sisters may be obtained by picturing them in the light of the known distinctions between witches, sorceresses, Hecate, and the Erinyes, and a discussion of the figure of Hecate.

I may say that there are no such persons as witches, *qua* witches, in *Macbeth,* but instead, there are composite figures combining the attributes of witches, sorceresses and the Erinyes. At this point it is advisable to clear away the misconceptions that cluster around the word 'weird'. In the edition of *Macbeth* as presented by Davenant, there is a summary of the play, *Argument,* as Davenant calls it. Therein one sees how Davenant handles the word witch, and as he lived in Shakespeare's era, in fact he was Shakespeare's godson, one may suppose that he knew what Shakespeare meant when using the words 'witch' or 'weird'. The relevant portion of the *Argument* runs as follows: "These two (Macbeth and Banquo) Travelling together through a Forest, were met by three Fairie Witches (Weirds the Scots call them) . . ." [These three beings then make their prophecies] "Seeing then how happily the Prediction of the three Weirds fell out . . ." [Macbeth proceeded to kill the King and Banquo]. "Afterwards on some new Fears, consulted with certain of his Wizards about his future Estate . . ." Of course, portions of the *Argument* are copied verbatim from Heylin's *Microcosmos,* which in the second edition has: "These two . . .

[1] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1906), p. 341.
[2] *Macbeth,* ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1951), p. xxi.

were mette by three Fairies or Witches (Weirds the Scots call them)."[3]

The Oxford English Dictionary makes a distinction between the meaning of weird, *qua* weird, and weird in Shakespeare's phrase, weird sisters. The primary meaning of *weird* is "the principle or power or agency by which events are predetermined; fate, destiny." The secondary meaning is in the plural: "The Fates, the three goddesses supposed to determine the course of human life."

Holinshed, on whom Shakespeare drew for some of his material in Macbeth, has: "three women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of the elder world, . . . the common opinion was, that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say), the goddesses of destinee or else some nymphs or fairies."

In the illustration to Holinshed's *Scottish Chronicle* these three women are shown robed in costumes of princesses, not of witches. Dover Wilson points out that: ". . . students of St. John's College dressed as *tres quasi Sibyllae* had met James on his visit to Oxford in 1605 and recited Latin verses to him."[4] Thus in Shakespeare's own day these three weird sisters were not regarded as witches, but were called Sibyls, because of their ability to prophesy.

Though the stage directions refer to these three sisters as witches, it must be noted that in the text of *Macbeth* Shakespeare uses the word witch only twice. Thus in IV.i.23 the word witch is in the enumeration of the ingredients put into the cauldron for a magical brew, namely:

> Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf
> Witches' mummy . . .

Here the use of the word, witch, throws no light on the possibility of the weird sisters being witches. In the other use of this word one of the weird sisters is called a witch. Thus in I. iii. 7 one finds:

> Aroint thee witch, the rump fed ronyon cries.

Here the use of the word, witch, is clearly as a term of abuse, not a sign of recognition nor of identification. Its use actually tells us nothing about the person abused. Such abuse does not necessarily turn the person abused into a witch, any more than the use of the word, bitch, as a term of abuse, turns that person into one of the canines.

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[3] Peter Heylin, *Microcosmos* (Oxford, 1625), p. 509.
[4] *Macbeth*, ed. Wilson, p. xx.

Paul,[5] well aware that the weird sisters are not witches by ordinary standards, tries out the compromise of calling them Scotch witches, as though such a compromise solved the problem of what Shakespeare intended these three women to be. By calling mealies Turkey wheat, I do not thereby place mealies in the genera of wheats, neither does Paul succeed in turning the three weird sisters into witches by calling them Scotch witches.

The power of witchcraft is believed to be used for purely personal and malicious ends. The aim of the night-roving witch is the annihilation of some person well known to, and intimate with, the witch. Hence witches cannot bring about by witchcraft the death of strangers. Deaths by witchcraft always occur among those in some way related to the witch either biologically—more usually—or else culturally. A witch encompasses the death of her victim by devouring its soul substance, its spirit. The theory is that witches are powerful enough at night to capture souls that are unprotected by magical charms or by charms that are weak. The captured soul is then brought to where a coven of witches is assembled and there, night after night, a type of cannibal feast is held. As the victim's soul is devoured, the victim sickens, and when the last morsel of the soul is consumed the victim dies. In other words, slow deaths are usually ascribed to witchcraft, the witch is regarded as taking a sadistic delight in watching her victim suffer and slowly perish. The standard familiars of a witch are the bat, the cat, the owl and the wolf.

A witch may now be defined as the cannibal of the spirit world. This definition, as will be seen, nowise fits the three weird sisters.

A sorcerer, or practitioner of black magic, works otherwise. Such a one deals in magic. All magic conforms with a standard pattern that is world-wide in its uniformity. There must be a performer, a rite, a substance and an incantation or spell or the use of words of power. By these means it is believed that a person can compel the supernatural forces of the cosmos to do his behest, to be subservient to his will. Magic can be learnt or taught, and one is reminded of the tomes on magic that Prospero perused. Magic is operative throughout the twenty-four hours and can bring about the death of strangers. Deaths from magic are usually sudden and may occur at any time. Magic may, of course, be practised for social ends, and is then white magic. Witchcraft never can; witchcraft, like black magic or sorcery, is practised only

[5] H. N. Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (New York, 1950), p. 193.

for evil or anti-social ends, and only at night.

Sorcery achieves its ends by employing means to that end, whereas in the case of witchcraft no means are employed; it is solely the evil power inherent in the witch that brings about the death of her victim. In a case of death by sorcery the body dies, but, as in the case of John Brown, the "soul goes marching on". In a case of death by witchcraft the soul is consumed and perishes. There is no hereafter or resurrection for it.

As both sorcery and witchcraft have the same purpose, the same end in view, the destruction of a human being, these two terms tend to become confused, and the one wrongly used for the other.

The stage is now set for an analysis of the so-called witches in *Macbeth*. The question arises, what then are these three weird sisters? The first thing to notice is that they appear in connection with kings and royalty; they are not, as witches are, concerned with commoners. Moreover, it is important to notice that the three weird sisters appear in connection with "the killing of the King", the theme that runs through the folklore enshrined in Sir James George Frazer's *Golden Bough*: secondly and lastly, that there are three of them and that they prophesy enigmatically, and ambiguously foretell the future.

Now kings, as gods or as heads of Church and State, possess a dual character. In the language of theology a king is a *mixta persona,* and in virtue of the spiritual power thus invested in him, he has as his ecclesiastical minions, bishops and priests, whom he appoints. These minions have power over witches to exorcise them; so much greater then is the inherent power of a king over witches that they cannot confront him.

Kings, royalty and the priesthood are magically too well protected, far too strong magically, to be within the reach of witches and their mundane craft and practices; but kings, royalty and the priesthood are by no means beyond the reach of the supernatural whose forces can be invoked, guided and controlled by magic.

Consequently one cannot accept the *rôle* of the three weird sisters, the three fateful sisters, as that of witches. What then are these three? The answer to this question is not easily come by, but one can throw light on their beginnings by recollecting that they are associated with kings. Hence a glance at the beginnings of the kingship is worthwhile.

The earliest known kings are those of ancient Egypt, where the Pharaoh became the sun-god. As such he had three well known

and distinct aspects, so distinct that each was given a name. Hence one individual had a tripartite personality, as it were, and might have been represented in statuary with, for instance, three heads. The Pharaoh as the morning sun was called Khepri, as the noon-day sun he was known as Ra, and as the setting sun as Temu. These three aspects were represented in Egyptian folklore by three separate gods known as Khepri, Ra and Temu. Furthermore, and this point is important, these three aspects marked the three main stages of a king's life, namely birth, life, death.

It seems that when this Egyptian folklore drifted into Greece it took two forms, firstly that of the Fates who according to Phin were three sisters presiding over the destinies of men. "Their names were Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. According to Hesiod, it is Clotho who spins the web of man's destiny; Lachesis who assigns to man his fate, and Atropos who cuts the thread of life."[6] This form of the tradition does not appear in *Macbeth,* but the second form does. In the second form, these three aspects of a man's life, represented as in ancient Egypt by three separate gods, became in ancient Greece portrayed in one tripartite figure, showing three aspects of one goddess who, as a result, was known as Trivia. Sometimes she is represented with three heads, namely those of a horse, a lion and a dog. This goddess had, as might be surmised, control over birth, life and death, and her name was Hecate. Shakespeare was well aware of her tripartite nature, for in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* V. i. 373, he speaks of "triple Hecate's team." He also alludes to her in *As You Like It* III. ii. 2, as: "Thou thrice crowned queen of night."

As Hecate is invoked by name in the play, it is necessary to give a brief study of her so that one may ascertain what was Shakespeare's meaning and intent when he introduced her. She was frequently identified with Selene (Moon), Artemis and Persephone. Her sanctuary in Samothrace was the Zerynthian cave, and whenever she was worshipped her temple was placed near a cave; but caves are entrances to Hades and the nether world, and Hecate was connected with Hades.

Professor Kirby Flower Smith refers to offerings, made in ancient Greece to Hecate, as *Hecate's suppers.*[7] These suppers, because the offerings were to be eaten at night, were ". . . laid at the

[6] J. Phin, *The Shakespeare Cyclopaedia and New Glossary* (London, 1902), p. 113.
[7] K. F. Smith, "Hecate's Suppers", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* Vol. VI, ed. J. Hastings (London, 1913), p. 565.

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cross-roads every month for Hecate. Their purpose was to placate not only this dread goddess of the underworld, but also, as we learn from Plutarch (Moralia 209A), the ghosts of those who, for some reason, cannot rest easy in their graves, and come back to earth in search of vengeance. . . . Hecate's suppers were naturally deposited at the cross-roads." Furness, commenting on the stage directions for the opening scene as used by various producers, writes: ". . . om. Ff. A Cross-way."[8] This statement is most significant, because a reference by Macbeth to "pale Hecate's offerings" occurs in the play; but what is more significant is that the play opens, as it should open, with Macbeth physically, and mentally, and morally at the crossways.

According to Professor Rose, Hecate started as an earth goddess, but later became a goddess of the night and so became connected with the moon. "Indeed the three faces on her statue are not infrequently taken to stand for her three personalities, Selene in Heaven, Artemis on earth, Hecate in hell." She, at night, was believed to send "from the lower world all kinds of demons and terrible phantoms, who taught sorcery and witchcraft . . . and dwelt near places where murder had been committed."[9] Professor Kirby Flower Smith writes: "The goddess par excellence of magic and magicians throughout antiquity is Hecate-Selene, the Dea Triformis of the crossways, and the queen of the ghosts who sweeps through the night followed by her dreadful train of questing spirits . . . . The most famous and dramatic incantations in antiquity were associated with her . . ."[10]

One wonders who or what these questing spirits were, and one thinks of the Erinyes, or Furies of whom there were ultimately three, namely Tisiphone, Megaera and Alecto. According to Murray, these three were sisters, the daughters of Night: "They were attendants of Hades and Persephone, and lived at the entrance to the lower world."[11] Now, as I have mentioned, caves give access to the lower world. It is thus clear that these Erinyes and Hecate have so much in common that one may safely assume they went about together. The function of the Erinyes is, according to Professor Rose, to be the terrible, "but just, avengers of crime and executors of curses invoked by one wronged on those who have

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[8] *Macbeth New Variorium*, ed. H. H. Furness (New York, 1873), Vol. II, p. 3.
[9] H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London, 1933), p. 122.
[10] K. F. Smith, "Magic (Greek and Roman)", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VIII, ed. J. Hastings (London, 1915), p. 282.
[11] A. S. Murray, *Manual of Mythology* (New York, 1950), p. 216.

wronged him, but most especially on those who have violated the ties of kinship . . . it is the Erinyes who punish him, in this world or the next; man does not, for there is no man in a position to do so."[12] In other words, I regard the three weird sisters as a dramatized Shakespearean version of the Erinyes. Under no circumstances can the three weird sisters, as counterparts of the Erinyes or companions of Hecate, be classified as witches.

This identification of the three weird sisters ultimately with the Erinyes is nothing new. The Rev. Sir George W. Cox writing of the Erinyes says: "Being now referred to the stage of man's life, they became three in number, and were known as Allekto, Megaira and Tisiphone (names which denote endless hatred, jealousy, and revenge), as the three Moerai, called Klotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, weave, deal out and cut short the thread of human life. This later mythology, is, it must be confessed, thoroughly artificial. The course of human life is summed up in the past, the present and the future; and it only remained to assign each of them to one personal being. . . . They answer to the Teutonic Vurdh, Verdhandi, and Skuld, arbitrary names denoting the past, the present and the future. These are the weird sisters whom Macbeth encounters on the desolate heath; the Thriai, with whom Hermes is bidden to take counsel; the Norns, who guard the ash tree Yggdrasil. . . . The fatal sisters reappear in the Latin Parcae."[13]

Having thus outlined what I conceive to be the background to the three weird sisters, it is now necessary to consider some of their aspects in more detail.

Here one may pause to take stock of Shakespeare's knowledge of mythology. Alecto, one of the Furies, is mentioned in 2 *Henry IV*, V. v. 39: "Rouse up revenge from ebon den with fell Alecto's snake." While Atropos, one of the Parcae or Fates, is likewise named in 2 *Henry IV*, II. iv. 213, where Pistol says: "Come, Atropos, I say!" In Hades runs the river of forgetfulness, Lethe, and though Hades is not mentioned by Shakespeare, there is an allusion to it in 'ebon den' above, while Lethe is mentioned a number of times in Shakespeare's plays, as for example in Julius Caesar III. i. 206: "and crimsoned in thy Lethe."

An examination of the two occasions in the play when Hecate is invoked reveals how well Shakespeare was versed in mythology,

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[12] Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p. 84.
[13] Sir George W. Cox, *An Introduction to the Science of Comparative Mythology and Folklore* (London, 1881), p. 61.

in spite of his "small Latine and less Greeke." In mythology Hecate's shrine is found where murder has been committed. In the play she is invoked just before the murder of King Duncan. Macbeth in his emboldening soliloquy II.i.49 says:

> . . . Now o'er the one half world
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtain'd sleep: Witchcraft celebrates
> Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd Murder,
> Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,
> Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace
> With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
> Moves like a ghost . . .

Sleep is the brother of death and Macbeth remarks that in his half of the world nature seems dead, because it is night and nature sleeps. He realizes that he is about to violate the ties of kinship. He is about to slay Duncan, his kinsman, and that therefore Hecate and her band will be let loose upon him. He ruminates that night is the domain of Hecate, whose gifts to mortal man are wicked and terrifying dreams that abuse the curtained sleep. Furthermore, it is at night that Hecate is dominant, celebrating her black magic at her shrine, where are set her suppers, food offerings for ghosts placed at the crossways to pacify and placate the unquiet dead till their deaths be avenged.

The remark in Furness about Hecate's offerings that they "were made with certain rites, hence the use of the word celebrate,"[14] misses the point. So also does Dover Wilson miss the point when he writes: *"off'rings,* ritual".[15] The use of the term "Hecate's offerings" has nothing to do with any celebration or ritual, but it confirms the stage directions in I. i. that the weird sisters met at the crossways on an open heath, because it is at crossways that offerings to Hecate (Hecate's suppers) are placed.

Hecate is called "pale" for a double reason, first because she is a moon-goddess, and secondly to remind the audience that she comes as a ghost from Hades, and all ghosts are pale and wan.

'Withered murder!' One can imagine Macbeth's thoughts to be running somewhat as follows: "This murder that I am pondering is no longer new or fresh in my mind. It is stale, nay 'tis worse than stale, it's withered, it's so old in my thoughts." "Moves . . . like a ghost" refers, of course, to Macbeth moving towards his

[14] *Macbeth New Variorum*, Vol. II, p. 92.
[15] *Macbeth*, ed. Wilson, p. 119.

devilish design, but the words also hint the future in the instant, that soon Duncan's ghost will be moving to pale Hecate's offerings to join the clamour of the unquiet dead that Duncan's death be avenged.

The wolf, introduced as a witch's familiar, is suggested by the hellhounds that act as sentinels and howl to Hecate; so now Macbeth, contemplating murder, is mentally sentinelled by the witch's familiar, the wolf. The next line, which reads "whose howl's his watch", offers some difficulty. The wolf does not howl out his watch. It is the owl that is the bellman of the night. The owl is also a witch's familiar in the air, and is a suitable companion to the wolf on the ground. In the play the owl is twice reported as punctuating with its screech the long watches of the night:

> It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman. II.ii.4.
> . . . The obscure bird
> Clamoured the livelong night. . . . II.iii.65-6.

The bellman's duty was to toll the watches of the night and here "the obscure bird" takes over these duties. I suggest that the owl shrieks at the moment of Macbeth's contemplation, and that this fact is obscured by the use of the obsolete northern dialect spelling 'howl' for the English spelling 'owl'. Thus 1500-20 Dunbar, a Scot, in his Poems XXXIII, 74, writes:

> The myttane, and Sanct Martynis fowle,
> Wend he had bene the hornit howle.

So, in my interpretation, the line should read:

> Whose owl's (is) his watch

In other words, withered murder, i.e. Macbeth, is sentinelled by the wolf and belled by the owl. Even if the emendation be not accepted, a knowledge of Hecate shows the source whence Shakespeare drew for this group of images.

The next occasion on which Hecate's name is invoked is again just before the murder of Banquo, where Macbeth assures Lady Macbeth that:

> . . . Ere the bat hath flown
> His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
> The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
> Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
> A deed of dreadful note. III.ii.40-44.

Here, by contrast, Hecate is described as black for a double reason; first because she is the goddess of night and is also associated with the dark of the underworld; and secondly, as a

sorceress concerned with black magic and the impending black murder of Banquo in the dark and cloudy evening of night. A knowledge of the cult of Hecate confirms the acceptance of the tradition that the action of IV. i., the cauldron scene, is placed in a cavern. The Folio text leaves the place unspecified, but the frontispiece to *Macbeth* in Rowe's edition of 1709 shows the scene played in a cave,[16] while Edward Capell, in his edition of 1768, added the stage direction: "A cavern. In the middle a boiling cauldron."[17] Hecate, in Shakespeare's text, does not appear in the scene, but her sanctuaries were also often in or near caves, thought to represent the gateways to Hades. The weird sisters are clearly in a closed space, as is seen from the reference to locks and from Macbeth's words: "Come in, without there!" The only confined space suitable for the preparation of magic connected with apparitions from the nether world is a cave.

The apparitions may have arisen out of the cauldron for the purposes of stage presentation, as suggested by Dover Wilson in a note on the stage directions for IV. i, and one is reminded of the Arabian nights where genii are conjured out of pots and bottles; but anyone acquainted with folklore knows that apparitions are hid within the earth and can be conjured out of it by the use of magic. One needs but recall the apparation of Samuel rising out of the earth before King Saul. The cauldron in the play is there for the purpose of making the magical brew, whereby to compel the supernatural forces to one's will. The cauldron itself finally recedes into the lower regions, as did the apparitions that were conjured up by the magic brewed in it.

Be it noted that these three sisters use spells, incantations and substances, and hence are practising magic, albeit black magic; but it is magic and not witchcraft. As a result they are able to control and invoke the supernatural to their wills. Each weird sister conjures up in turn from the nether world an unearthly apparition that, at the weird sister's command, speaks as an oracle in terms ambiguous of the future. The point to notice is that the three weird sisters, to use the language of the mart, deal in 'futures.' In I. iii, one finds the three weird sisters indulging in straightforward prophecies. Macbeth is hailed as "thane of Glamis, thane of Cawdor and shalt be King hereafter."

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[16] This frontispiece is reproduced in the New Clarendon Edition of *Macbeth*, ed. Bernard Groom (Oxford, 1949).
[17] As noted in *Macbeth*, ed. Wilson.

The three weird sisters are not witches, and here I may point out that witches do not make magic; consequently, though personifications of evil in themselves, they have no means of calling up from the vasty deep the spirits and the ghosts that lie hid within the womb of earth. They have no power or control over supernatural forces, neither do they haunt or frequent crossroads or caverns. The future is unknown to them. They have not the power nor the magic to foretell the future. The three weird sisters are not concerned with devouring the soul or souls of any person, but with the destinies of kings. It is clear that Hecate is not a witch, nor does she consort with witches.

The deaths of Duncan and of Banquo are not slow, lingering deaths, as would be the case if their deaths were due to the machinations of witches, but sudden deaths compatible with those achieved magically, and what would be expected from the great display of black magic in the play.

Neither Hecate nor the three weird sisters are related either biologically or culturally to any one in the play, whereas they would be if they were witches. Furthermore, whoever heard of a coven of three witches. Three is a number that is anathema to witches, and we have the three weird sisters chanting:

> Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
> And thrice again to make up nine.

Witches are exorcised in the name of the Trinity, and one of Hecate's names is Trivia; so I may conclude by quoting from days and times in England, earlier than those of Shakespeare, when the three weird sisters were recognized for what they are:

"C. 145 *Court of Love* 1173. I mene, the three of fatale destine, That be our werdes".

One can now see with what greater grandeur and awe the play opens. Macbeth stands bodily, mentally and morally at the crossways. What will be his choice? His mind is already evilly inclined, and such a mental state provides the opportunity suitable for the cosmic forces of evil to appear and to tell him truths to win him to his harm. The three weird sisters confront him at the crossways; but lest sympathy be aroused for Macbeth, as being but a poor puppet of elemental and cosmic forces, whence his will may cease to be his own and he can not choose to say "Evil be thou my good", Shakespeare deliberately lowers the stature of the elemental goddesses, by attaching to them at the very beginning, some of the detested attributes of witchcraft, associating them with

the owl and the cat, familiars of witches.

Shakespeare gives us weird glimpses of the three Fates or Furies who foretell the deaths of kings and nobles, and who pursue, like the avenging Erinyes, the murderer of Duncan and Banquo, both kinsmen of the murderer. Then, for reasons of his own, Shakespeare lowers the gigantic stature of these weird sisters by grafting onto them some of the attributes of mundane witchcraft, such as introducing graymalkin, the rat without a tail, the owl and the wolf. Shakespeare, nevertheless, strikes the grand note in the opening scene, elemental forces and a man at the crossways.

DRAMA IN THE UNIVERSITY

D. INSKIP

THE place which the study of drama for its own sake might occupy in a university curriculum has been under discussion n many quarters in recent years. The extreme positions may be said to be those taken up on the one hand by certain British universities, for whom drama is no more than a branch of literature, to be studied in the text as a matter of commentary, conjecture and exegesis; and on the other by some American nstitutions where the crafts and practice of the theatre are seen as the sole objective of dramatic studies. In between come such experiments as are in progress in South Africa, where for more than thirty years the University of Cape Town has had a School of Speech and Drama working in close association with the University Little Theatre and now with the Faculty of Arts, and where the University of Natal has a full Department of Drama which allows of specialization up to the stage of Honours studies. The Natal University is also the possessor of an experimental theatre where work of a laboratory character is carried on. At this moment when other universities in South Africa are beginning to nterest themselves in this matter, it is timely to look at the question from a broad and analytical standpoint.

It is obvious to all reflecting people that before the coming of railways the pace of communication and transport was of necessity that of the horse, just as to-day the aeroplane flying at 500 miles per hour is the measure of what is possible in these fields. Material means condition and accompany political and economic development. Yet few persons other than practising artists are aware of the material servitudes which at once condition and facilitate artistic development. Without labouring this point, is it not apparent that the beautiful and surprising lighting effects which accompany much theatrical work to-day were impossible before the application of electricity to stage lighting? And that the existence in Elizabethan England of inns whose interior courtyards were of a special shape had much to do with the type of staging practised at the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's day? Since it is in the theatre that we find a synthesis of all the applied arts, and since the playhouse itself may by its very form and dimensions influence the writer of plays, it may be fairly maintained

that to study drama without reference to the means and place of its performance is as unrealistic as to study medicine without attending a single clinical demonstration or operation.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the medium of expression of the drama should be language, since it is this aspect of the theatre which causes so much confusion in thought and practice. Nobody finds it strange that music should be studied in relation to the instruments of its performance, or that painting should be linked with the materials at the disposal of the artist. The very names of water-colour, oil or tempera show this to be the case. Where the theatre has manifested itself in full stature through the work of poets who were also playwrights, confusion has been worsened and deepened. People identify Shakespeare the poet with Shakespeare the dramatist, and without realizing that Shakespeare's dramatic sense and knowledge of the theatre are what makes him a dramatist. It is a great and fortunate accident that he is also a poet of the very first rank, but his poetry is not what makes him a dramatist. As far as universities in English-speaking countries are concerned, it is in all likelihood the prestige of Shakespeare the poet and thinker which has caused certain universities to shy away from the practical aspects of dramatic studies as though they feared the contamination of an unclean thing. "Give us poetry or nothing" they seem to say.

The basis and indeed the whole *raison d'être* of the theatre is the portrayal of character in action. In this portrayal language plays the first and most important part, since it is the instrument through which thought and emotion are made articulate: yet speech is by no means the whole of the actor's stock-in-trade. He also uses movement and gesture as aids to expression, and the producer further calls upon grouping, lighting, and at times musical accompaniment, to underline his understanding of the playwright's intentions. This is well illustrated by the fact that background music accompanies almost every film to-day throughout its length, and is indeed often specially written for the purpose. Again, the mime theatre and the ballet show us that words, although of primary importance in the theatre, are not indispensable for the conveyance of some emotions, and may become a positive hindrance in certain situations where gesture and movement have their own eloquence.

The theatre is a complex art form, and the study of the drama without reference to performance runs the risk of creating grave

misunderstandings in the mind of the student. It cannot be seriously maintained that a play lives as the author intended it to ive if it remains in manuscript, or within the covers of a book. The play's life is in its form, yet also in the interpretation of its orm by actors, producer, decorative artists and, by no means east, by the audience. Without the audience the theatre dies, both terally and figuratively. If we accept this rough simplication of a ery complicated series of problems, we see at once that for a roper academic study of the drama some attempt should be made o clarify for the student the nature and purpose of the play erformed.

It is about the way in which such clarification can best be ttempted that much of the discussion centres. Many universities ear, perhaps with some reason, that much pre-occupation with he tinsel glitter of the theatre, with what is conveyed by the ackneyed phrase "the glamour of the stage" may distract students rom the serious purpose of learning. There is some basis for this ear, and it is very easy indeed to waste time and lose direction n playing at play-acting. The right answer here is to be found, not n a summary rejection of the whole idea of studying the play erformed and not merely the play within the covers of a book, ut in the proper selection of curricula and instructors.

The problem changes in form and significance as we consider he undergraduate or the graduate student. For the understanding f the theatre much hard work is necessary, and some experience f living is important. Some of the most successful American niversity schools of drama are what is called graduate schools — n other words, they require their students to have acquired a eneral degree, usually in Arts, before admitting them to pecialized dramatic studies. There is much to be said for this pproach in a country the size of the United States, but it appears mpracticable in South Africa where we are hard put to it to rovide enough people with first or basic degrees. For us the roblem, if we consider it worthy of attention, must be that of ntroducing some practical dramatic studies into an existing first legree course, probably in the Faculty of Arts. The frivolous unter after glamour can be barred in various ways: either, as is lone in Bristol, by insisting that the study of drama must be ccompanied and completed by an equivalent study of an ancient r modern language and literature, or by requiring a student to ave completed various other courses before gaining admission

to the course in drama. Further, the practical work in speech training, mime, movement or production which will form the laboratory part of a course in drama, is an exacting and meticulous process when performed under competent and well-trained instructors. A student whose success at the examination depends on reaching a satisfactory standard in practical exercises, as well as on writing adequate papers, will probably find little time free for high jinks, or for the kind of behaviour which superficial observers link with the possession of long hair, suede shoes or jeans.

The results of introducing some study of the play performed into university studies of drama may be expected to be varied. Not every student can or should become an amateur actor even of an indifferent kind, but all could and should acquire more awareness and knowledge of the nature of the drama, especially in its complex links with human personality and human emotions. Few of us have enough talent to write well, and play-writing is a specialized craft. The study of the play performed may be decisive in showing one or two students how to approach a form of writing which attracts them without their knowing 'how to begin'. But whatever their personalities or their individual gifts, all students who study the drama in its living shape, or help to fashion it in however humble a role, will without doubt learn something of the real nature of artistic creation, and become aware in some measure that art is not something other than life, but an expression and a deepening of life and of experience.

"BY NO STRONG PASSION SWAYED"

A note on John Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*.

RICHARD MORTON

I

CRITICS usually see Aureng-Zebe as a dutiful son and a model of the heroic virtues, fittingly rewarded at the close of the play. "Aureng-Zebe must have his throne and his Indamora because he is so good a son."[1] They wonder how there could once have been concern over the reception of the piece by the real Aurengzebe, still barbarously and unheroically ruling in Delhi at the time of the play's first production:

> It is odd that those who have speculated on the probable wrath of Aureng-Zebe, had he come to know of this contemporary dramatisation, should have persistently overlooked the fact that the presentation is altogether complimentary, not to say flattering.[2]

Without question the Aureng-Zebe of Dryden is a paragon of filial obedience,[3] but the drama is more than an account of father-son relationships. One of its more hostile critics[4] has summarised the play: "There is in it represented two poignant emotions, sticky sentiment and lecherous lust." Dryden, the writer claims, misses his chance: "His incessant straining and striving after the ubiquitous love interest blinded him to the dramatic possibilities of his theme." The present note will suggest that the dramatic possibilities inherent in the love-theme are not neglected, and that Aureng-Zebe, politically admirable, is in his love less than ideal. He is an heroic protagonist after the fashion of Homer and Tasso:

> They made their heroes men of honour; but so as not to divest them quite of human passion and frailties: they contented themselves to show you, what men of great spirit

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[1] B. Dobrée, *Restoration Tragedy* (Oxford, 1929), p. 31–32.

[2] Note by Saintsbury in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Sir W. Scott and G. Saintsbury, Vol. V (Edinburgh, 1883), p. 185.

[3] Aureng-Zebe has also been described as the representative of political responsibility, "in contrast to the motives of the self-willed and passion-enslaved absolutist, his father; and he sums up more than a century of reflection on monarchy". R. Wallerstein, *Dryden and the Analysis of Shakespeare's Techniques*, *RES.* XIX, 1943, p. 169.

[4] M. Elwin, *The Playgoer's Handbook to Restoration Drama* (1928), p. 91–92.

would certainly do when they were provoked, not what they were obliged to do by the strict rules of moral virtue.[5]

Aureng-Zebe, in the grip of a passion which hardly deserves the title of *uno habito nobilissimo della volontà,* goes through a period of tragic blindness, to attain true insight and understanding at the end of the play.

II

A summary of the theme of the play will clarify the significance of Aureng-Zebe's position. The action is based on the conflict between the passions and reason. That freedom from the grip of the passions, the sceptical man's contentment, is the essential feature of Aureng-Zebe's character, as opposed to the fiery temper of his brothers, is stressed at the beginning of the play:

Darah, the eldest bears a generous mind;
But to implacable revenge inclin'd.
Too openly does Love and hatred show. . . .
From *Sujah*'s valour I should much expect,
But he's a *Bigot* of the *Persian* Sect. . . .
Morat's too insolent, too much a Brave,
His Courage to his Envy is a Slave. . . .
But *Aurenge-Zebe,* by no strong passion sway'd,
Except his Love, more temp'rate is, and weigh'd.[6]

While his brothers are slaves to their passions and his father is given over to his luxurious and slothful existence, demonstrating his essential lack of responsibility, Aureng-Zebe is free of any emotional ties, "except his Love". This exception is the cause of his suffering. But his mistress, Indamora, is not swayed by passion even in her love, and she and Melesinda are the exponents of tranquillity throughout the play. In their dialogue during the fighting—so different from that of the rival queens of Marlowe or Lee in similar situations—they express their horror at the princes' ambitions and their own preference for the simple life:

Too truly *Tamerlain*'s Successors they,
Each thinks a World too little for his sway.

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[5] *Essays of John Dryden,* ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford, 1926), Vol. I, p. 156–157. ("Of Heroic Plays"). That this essay is to a certain extent self-justification has, however, been shown by W. S. Clark, *The Sources of the Restoration Heroic Play, RES.* IV, 1928, pp. 49–63, and a different interpretation of Tasso's ideal of heroic virtue may be found in A. E. Parsons, *The English Heroic Play, MLR.* XXXIII, 1938, p. 2.

[6] "Aureng-Zebe", Dryden, *The Dramatic Works,* ed. Montague Summers (1932), Vol. IV, p. 91.

Could you and I the same pretences bring,
Mankind should with more ease receive a King:
I would to you the narrow World resign . . .[7]

At the end of the play Indamora is even able to restore the balance of Morat's mind, persuading him of the evils of overpowering passion:

How you confound desires of good and ill!
For true renown is still with Virtue joyn'd;
But lust of Pow'r lets loose th'unbridl'd mind.
Yours is a Soul irregularly great,
Which wanting temper, yet abounds with heat.[8]

In such images of uncontrolled emotions, of passions ruling the man, is the characters' lack of balance noted and criticized.

The destructive tendency of heady emotions is demonstrated by the cunning contrast between Morat and the emperor. At first the sloth of the emperor and the vaunting ambition of Morat seem far apart:

Luxurious Kings are to their People lost;
They love, like Drones, upon the public cost.
My Arms, from Pole to Pole, the World shall shake:
And with my self, keep all Mankind awake.[9]

The contrast might make us think Morat's purpose, though indeed less than statesmanlike, heroic and patriotic. But later we learn that Morat's battles, like his father's luxury, are merely pastimes to deaden the boredom of the passion-ruled man, and no part of the kingly duty so well understood by Aureng-Zebe. Morat describes his plans:

What bus'ness has my Conscience with a Crown?
She sinks in Pleasures, and in Bowls will drown.
If mirth should fail, I'll busie her with cares;
Silence her clamorous voice with louder Wars.[10]

The passions, when indulged, burn themselves out and are wasted, as in the remarkable last scene of the play, where the unreturned love of Melesinda, which

could, though he supply'd no fuel, burn.
Rich in itself, like Elemental fire[11]

leads her to the funeral pyre, while the fierce and all-consuming passions of Nourmahal lead her to madness and death. Both are

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[7] ibid, p. 116.
[8] ibid. p. 146.
[9] ibid. p. 119.
[10] ibid. p. 145.
[11] ibid. p. 160.

emotionally unrealistic; the end of each is the same, although the ways differ in purity and dignity. The scene is an apt culmination of the treatment of unrestrained passion throughout the play.

III

It has been suggested that in tragic theory Dryden stood between two ages:

> between one that distrusted the passions and was determined to live according to reason, and one that wanted to feel in considerable quantities the pleasure and profit of emotionality.[12]

Pity is moved, as Dryden states in his *Preface concerning the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy,* by the consideration that the greatest and most virtuous of men are not exempt from the variations of fortune. This theory underlies the dramatization of the misfortunes of heroic protagonists. On the other hand:

> The Neo-Stoics of the seventeenth century demanded a purgation from tragedy in which the spectator is led by means of fear for himself to resist the approaches of passion in his breast, lest the passion overcome his reasoning faculty and lead him into evil ways.[13]

Aureng-Zebe satisfies both desires; in his political actions he is the unfortunate heroic protagonist, in his amatory excesses he is a faulty tragic character suffering and learning from his errors. Through folly and hasty temper, and under extreme provocation, he falls into the grip of ungovernable passions and comes near to losing his Indamora. In spite of the expressed opinion of him at the beginning of the play, he is shown from the first with some tendency to lose control—a tendency which would certainly not be discouraged by heredity and environment. He feels the necessity for Indamora's calming influence,

> But here she comes!
> In the calm Harbour of whose gentle breast,
> My Tempest-beaten Soul may safely rest,[14]

and his "Tempest-beaten Soul" is at once made evident by his near-quarrel with Indamora and by his willingness to draw his sword. This time, however, all goes well, and the storm blows over:

[12] B. Hathaway, *John Dryden and the Function of Tragedy*, *PMLA*, LVIII, 1943, p. 673.
[13] ibid. p. 665.
[14] *Aureng-Zebe*, p. 97–98.

My Virtue was surpris'd into a Crime.
Strong Virtue, like strong Nature, struggles still:
Exerts itself, and then throws off the ill.[15]

'e are shown a man governed by reason and in control of his ıssions, but not a cold-blooded man. His virtue has constantly be on the alert to guard his turbulent emotions.

The developing action causes doubts to appear in his mind. ıocked by the evil of the court he first counsels virtue to quit ‹e realm:

Thy *Indian* Air is deadly to thee grown:
Deceit and canker'd malice rule thy Throne.[16]

ater he is led even to question its power:

How vain is Virtue which directs our ways
Through certain danger, to uncertain praise![17]

ïis emotional conflicts sap his reason, and his virtue, which, as e shall see, is his brightest light, grows dim. While he lies in rison he is visited by Nourmahal, his supposed enemy, who ɔnfesses her incestuous love for him. He violently rejects her ffer. After his release he finds some slender cause to suspect ıdamora of love for Morat. The scene with Nourmahal has ıaken his faith in womankind, and he can now curse the sex ɛfore Indamora in terms equal to those which he had earlier ːstrained his father from using. The dramatist achieves an ironic ffect by making the scene with Indamora parallel the earlier ːene with Nourmahal, both in the general misunderstanding by ıureng-Zebe of the motives of Indamora and Nourmahal, and in articular verbal echoes.[18] His suspicions of Indamora are thus ıade more natural, if still no less inexcusable. When persuaded f his mistake, Aureng-Zebe this time continues passionate, merely ɔnverting his fierce jealousy to excess of love:

Love mounts, and rowls about my stormy mind,
Like Fire, that's born by a tempestuous Wind.
Oh, I could stifle you with eager haste!
Devour your kisses with my hungry taste!

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ibid. p. 100.
ibid. p. 97.
ibid. p. 113.
Note the parallel between Nourmahal's "I am not, cannot be your Enemy:/ Look, is there any malice in my eye" (p. 130) and Indamora's "My eyes your conquest, not your death, design'd" (p. 139), and the use of *souls*, *heart*, *noble*, *father* as key-words in speeches of similar purport; Nourmahal's "Can kindness to desert like yours be strange, *etc.*" (p. 130), and Indamora's "Think you base Interest Souls, like mine, can sway, *etc.*" (p. 139).

Rush on you! eat you! *etc.*[19]

The passionate outburst would seem more fitting from the mouth of Nourmahal, and the words and phrasing clearly echo her moments of rant. Obviously Aureng-Zebe's passions are now in full control and reason and virtue are overthrown.[20] At the end of the act Aureng-Zebe's assertion:

With Glory, and with Love, at once I burn[21]

will be recollected by the audience when, only twenty-five lines later, Morat exclaims:

Urg'd by my Love, by hope of Empire fir'd.[22]

Both are clearly the expressions of men ruled by, rather than governing their emotions.

Aureng-Zebe swings back again to jealousy, Indamora is again to be suspected, and the lovers nearly part before Aureng-Zebe realizes his error, confessing:

Forgive those foolish words—
They were the froth my raging folly mov'd,
When it boil'd up: I knew not then I lov'd;
Yet then lov'd most.[23]

Talia iactabam et furiata mente ferebar: the speech is clearly not great self-analysis[24] but it serves to point Aureng-Zebe's awareness of his fault and promises consistency in the future. "I'll give myself the lie," he vows, taking Indamora's hand.

Aureng-Zebe's twin attainments, his crown and his Indamora, are not achieved in the same way; as an heroic prince he strives with adversity to gain political success, as a lover he overcomes his passions to merit his mistress. We can perhaps find in a single hero the satisfaction of both the heroic and the stoic ideas of tragedy. However, although the play might be academically

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[19] *Aureng-Zebe*, p. 141.

[20] The violence of the speech, and its significant place in the tragedy, is aptly recollected by Tom Thumb, when, with ironic joy, he makes his tragic decision to wed: "I'll hug, caress, I'll eat her up with love." Henry Fielding, "The Tragedy of Tragedies", *Eighteenth Century Comedy*, ed. W. D. Taylor (Oxford, 1929), p. 293.

[21] *Aureng-Zebe*, p. 143.

[22] ibid, p. 144.

[23] ibid. p. 159.

[24] It perhaps deserves Fielding's parody:

I've try'd to Reason's Tune, to tune my Soul
But Love did overwind and crack the String.
Tho' Jove in Thunder had cry'd out, YOU SHAN'T,
I should have lov'd her still—for oh strange fate,
Then when I lov'd her least, I lov'd her most.
(*Eighteenth Century Comedy*, p. 285).

justified as a tragedy, it is clear that for stage production Dryden has fallen between two stools. A completely admirable character is seldom successfully and interestingly portrayed in the theatre, but such a character can be clothed with a romantic glamour which will hold the audience's attention, if nothing more. Such is possibly the case with Almanzor in *The Conquest of Granada*. Aureng-Zebe is not perfect (although a perverse production of the play stressing the political theme might succeed in glamorising him); but his interest as a tragic hero is severely limited. His flaw, unlike that of Antony in *All for Love,* is too lacking in universality, too closely bound up with his partial status as a completely virtuous hero. He comes to us as virtue with a crack in it, King Arthur with a bad temper, and thus forfeits both our admiration and our sympathy.

IV

Throughout the play Dryden reinforces his comparison between reason and the passions by the use of imagery, which, though seldom adventurous, is unified and closely linked to the themes of the play. Images of winds and storms, as we might expect, illuminate the concept of turbulent passions and the tempest-beaten souls of the characters, but a less obvious commentary on this theme is provided by the images of light and fire.[25] The major image in the first part of the play is the sun. That kings should speak of themselves as suns is natural, and we are not surprised to hear the emperor described as the evening sun:

> But as the Sun, when he from Noon declines,
> And with abated heat, less fiercely shines,
> Seems to grow milder as he goes away,
> Pleasing himself with the remains of Day:
> So he who, in his Youth, for Glory strove,
> Would recompense his Age with Ease and Love—[26]

or Morat justifying his bustle thus:

> Kings, like Heav'ns Eye, should spread their beams around.
> Pleas'd to be seen while Glory's race they run:
> Rest is not for the Chariot of the Sun.[27]

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[25] The use of fire images for the passionate man is, of course, as old as the *Aeneid*, in which, as Mr W. F. Jackson Knight has recently reminded us, the the device is frequent to delineate Turnus.
[26] *Aureng-Zebe*, p. 91.
[27] ibid. p. 118.

But it is with glory that the passion-ridden characters shine, or hope to shine, whereas Aureng-Zebe (at the beginning of the play) and Indamora shine with the pure light of virtue. Nor are the beams of glory without their mundane purpose, for their aim is to dazzle and warm to life, while virtue is content to shine for its own sake, or at any rate with spiritual rather than calorific ends. We recollect the 'elemental Fire' of Melesinda which required no aliment, while the burning lakes of Nourmahal's mind had constantly to seize fuel:

> Pull, pull that reverend piece of Timber near:
> Throw't on—'tis dry—'twill burn—[28]

The passions are throughout conceived of as fiery, devouring the passionate man and all who come near him, and such destructive and insatiable flames break forth in Aureng-Zebe himself in the second half of the play. Scorching heat and purifying light are the major images to represent the passions and reason. So the emperor is the sun, heating the slave-like Arimant to life:

> That crawling Insect, who from Mud began,
> Warm'd by my Beams, and kindl'd into Man—[29]

and the idea is repeated by Nourmahal, but with the sterile desert rather than fertile mud as the object of heat:

> Though Youth and Beauty cannot warmth command;
> The Sun in vain shines on the barren Sand.[30]

Morat, too, according to Melesinda, must shine transitively rather than elementally. She describes her state while he is away:

> Can Flow'rs but droop in absence of the Sun,
> Which wak'd their sweets? and mine, alas! is gone.[31]

While these suns propagate and stimulate growth, the virtuous light of Aureng-Zebe and Indamora confines itself to frightening owls:

> Oh *Aureng-Zebe*! thy virtues shine too bright,
> They flash too fierce: I, like the Bird of Night,
> Shut my dull eyes, and sicken at the sight.[32]

The image is transferred to Indamora by Aureng-Zebe:

> Care shuns thy walks; as at the cheerful light,
> The groaning Ghosts and Birds obscene take flight.[33]

Whereas Melesinda, who flourishes or droops according to the beams of Morat, feels that her destiny is

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[28] ibid. p. 160.
[29] ibid. p. 104.
[30] ibid. p. 108.
[31] ibid. p. 116.
[32] ibid. p. 97.
[33] ibid. p. 98.

a gleam of bliss, too hot to last,
Watry it shines, and will be soon o'r-cast;[34]

and Morat's soul is, according to Indamora, "As Sun which does through Vapours dimly shine",[35] Zayda, Nourmahal's confidante, can say:

Sure *Aureng-Zebe* has somewhat of Divine,
Whose virtue through so dark a clowd can shine.[36]

In the last two acts of the play, however, images from fire are more common than those from light and the sun, and constantly illustrate the theme of passionate love. No ardent lover of Ovidian convention flames more fiercely than Aureng-Zebe, whose reason is quite unable to stay the heat of his passions. We have noted Aureng-Zebe's comparison of his love to a devouring flame,[37] an image which before only the emperor had used of himself. Morat aptly offers himself to Indamora as "A Phoenix-Lover, rising from his Tomb", [38] for the lover who is aflame must be quenched [39] or he will be reduced to ashes. Aureng-Zebe, when in the grip of his passion, finds the pure light of virtue extinguished and blazes with emotional ardour. His balance is as disordered as that of Nourmahal or the old emperor, but is, happily, finally restored, his goodness having been but "surpris'd into a Crime".

V

The student of Restoration tragedy often finds himself reduced to reading a play and confessing the author's failure. It must be confessed that the ending to *Aureng-Zebe* seems unsatisfactory. The hero's moment of insight is scurried over and the audience is not persuaded that he will not start ranting about the palace again at the next domestic upset. And yet we may wonder whether or not a solution to the problem lies in the last scene, with the *sati* of Melesinda and the madness of Nourmahal. The ending of the play is perhaps an example of that architectural prettiness which, it has been said, replaces human understanding at the close of Dryden's tragedies:

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[4] ibid. p. 117.
[5] ibid. p. 146.
[6] ibid. p. 122.
[7] See foot of p. 63.
[8] i.e. "Aureng-Zebe's tomb". *Aureng-Zebe*, p. 145.
[9] Compare Nourmahal's statements: "The Drudge had quench'd my flames, and then had di'd" (p. 150), and "Quench me: pour on whole Rivers. 'Tis in vain" (p. 160).

> With Dryden the end is never a terrific emotion, a frozen staring at fate or fortune, a fatalistic acceptance of life, such as we feel at the conclusion of the greatest tragedies . . . It is, rather, a graciousness, a compensation for the hardness of existence, that we are led to feel.[40]

Nourmahal's ravings are the natural outpourings of a mind overcome by the passions, and Melesinda's fate follows inevitably on her wifely submission to duty. If Aureng-Zebe rebukes Indamora for her timidity he must approve of Melesinda for her suicide; if he does not rebuke himself for his lack of control he must not despise Nourmahal's excesses. The essential conflict in Aureng-Zebe is thus externalized and the balance to which he must return is presented to him symbolically. Minute self-analysis is avoided in a climax which shows us not only the culmination of the strife between reason and the passions represented by the stream of fire-imagery, but the epitome of Aureng-Zebe's tragic problem—the *reductio ad absurdum* of conjugal abasement and passionate love.

[40] *Dryden and Artificial Tragedy*, *TLS.* 15 August 1929.

SIR WILLIAM CRAIGIE

SIR WILLIAM CRAIGIE, doyen of English lexicographers, died at his home Ridgehurst, Christmas Common, Watlington, Oxon., on 2nd September, 1957. He was the holder of no less than seven honorary Doctor's degrees, including those of Oxford and Cambridge, and a learned honorary member of eight foreign linguistic societies. He had been President of three English philological societies; and, in addition to being a Knight Commander, was Knight of the Order of the Icelandic Falcon.

These honours sat lightly upon him; he never lost the common touch or that love of hospitality which made all friends and lovers of language welcome at his home. An immense capacity for work, maintained until his ninetieth year, was aided by an alertness of mind and unerring judgment in assessing the value of work and men. He was the most accessible and generous of scholars, with a simple Scots way of life, which accounted for his longevity.

The list of Sir William's publications occupies nine pages of the *Memoir* presented to him in his eighty-fifth year. Few people know that he contributed to Andrew Lang's celebrated *Fairy Books* before the turn of the century, and also to the same author's *Dreams and Ghosts* (1897). But his greatest monuments are his contributions to the *New English Dictionary,* of which he was one of the four Editors, from 1901 to 1933, writing the Historical Introduction to the Supplementary Volume in the latter year; *The Dictionary of American English,* in four volumes, which occupied him, as Professor of English at Chicago University, from 1925 to 1944; *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue,* the first part of which was published in 1931, and on which he was working to the last; and the Supplement to Vigfusson's *Icelandic-English Dictionary,* published by the Oxford University Press this year (1957). Among other works, he was the editor of *Specimens of Anglo-Saxon Prose* (1923-29), and the Temple Classics *Burns,* on whom he wrote *A Primer* (1896); he was the author of *Scandinavian Folklore* (1896), *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (1906), *The Icelandic Sagas* (1913), and *The Pronunciation of English* (1917). He wrote a large number of papers for the Society of Pure English, founded by Robert Bridges, including some irreplaceable ones on the evolution of English spelling. In the latter sphere he was the acknowledged authority, as is testified

by his book *English Spelling: Its Rules and Reasons,* published in New York in 1927.

Among my most treasured possessions are three papers of Sir William, which he gave me on my last visit to Ridgehurst in August, 1953. The titles are "Northumbrian Dialects", "Standard English and the Dialects" and "Dialect: Miscellaneous Notes" (the last in his autograph). He had sensed the inadequacy of my knowledge of English dialect usages in Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques, and unselfishly parted with notes which he knew would be useful to a less fortunate colleague in Africa.

There had been heavy rain, and we sat in the study by a fire of light logs, cut and prepared by Sir William himself. With us was his neighbour and friend Major J. J. Munro, the Shakespearian scholar, who died last year with a new edition of *Shakespeare* almost completed. It was a lively and talkative afternoon, crowned by an excellent Scotch tea. As I drove away at 5.30 p.m., I stopped by the bend of what was probably an old Saxon earthwork on the fringe of the Chilterns. Sir William was at the porch, waving good-bye; and I pondered whether such a race of scholar-gentlemen could possibly survive the modern Babel of technical tongues.

A. C. PARTRIDGE.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Reviewed by E. DAVIS

The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, by Gardner B. Taplan. Murray. 42s.

NOWADAYS Elizabeth Barrett Browning is known, if at all, because of the charm with which some of Hollywood's leading goddesses have rocked crinolines and twinkled the cuffs of long drawers in various impersonations of Browning's sweetheart.

Mr Taplan is at pains to show that Elizabeth was never vain about her looks. He has also taken a great deal of trouble in reporting or resuscitating both the exterior and the interior of the Barrett household which seems to have embodied every ornate horror known to the Victorians.

Rudolf Besier is responsible for making the legend of Elizabeth eclipse her literary work. Many academic biographies have followed. Mr Taplan's *Life* is, if we discount the many pages he devotes to the study of Victorian bric-à-brac and Mr Barrett's sidewhiskers, the first considerable attempt at a critical study of what Elizabeth wrote. He reminds us that during her own lifetime she was most renowned for her verse novel *Aurora Leigh.* Ruskin called it "the greatest poem in the English language, unsurpassed by anything but Shakespeare." To-day, when Elizabeth's reputation rests chiefly on that moving but over-anthologised lyric, *The Great God Pan,* she ranks only slightly above Mrs Hemans and Eliza Cook.

Sonnets from the Portuguese (so-called even though they were quarried mainly from Lamartine and De Musset) have been used much as the Temple of the Vestals was used by later and inferior builders.

We do not nowadays think that *Aurora Leigh* merits Ruskin's exalted view of it. Edward Fitzgerald's caddish remark about it is one with which we may secretly sympathize, in spite of our natural sympathy with Browning's wrath. On the whole, and in spite of anything Mr Taplan has to say in praise of his Elizabeth, she reveals herself fully when she praises Euripides for "his droppings of warm tears". Mr Taplan's prodigious labours do not succeed in annihilating this impression.

Boswell in Search of a Wife. Edited by Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle. Heinemann. 30s.

Now that the University of Yale has exclusive possession of a trunkful of Boswell's literary remains, *fin de siècle* literature, whatever its vagaries, is bound to be studded with many volumes of Boswelliana. This is hardly a depressing prospect, if the succeeding volumes maintain the quality achieved by the collaboration of Professors Brady and Pottle. Here is literary research at its most penetrating and illuminating. The full texts are established and reproduced. The labours of interpretation are concealed and not paraded, though the task of reassembling so many of Boswell's fragments into a self-explanatory whole must have been formidable. Where explanations are necessary, they are provided. Best of all, where an intelligent judgment is demanded, the editors recognize their responsibility, refuse to shelter behind a cloak of 'impartiality', scorn to hedge, and declare themselves clearly and with courage. Boswell, in their view, as well as in Dr Johnson's, is every kind of ass; only he is a solemn ass, one who takes himself with a seriousness so unshaken that he is able, eventually, to discover in his assdom the major secrets of man.

This is important. It seems to point to a saving principle for the human intellect. Take anything seriously enough, even yourself, and you will eventually light on a truth greater than yourself. What Boswell discovered during the period 1766-69, the three years which established him in prosperity, was no less a truth than that contemplation even of an ass may bring us godlike insight. It was a practical demonstration of Aristotle's pet thesis: How is man to be happy? By modelling his behaviour on that of the gods. But what do the gods do? What need they do, being gods, but sit and think? Boswell ran about a great deal and thought only in *clichés;* but interiorly he was as the gods—a mind reclining, careless of mankind, curious about how his fellow-beings might contribute to his own deification. In these three years, in fact, we witness the beginning of as remarkable a metamorphosis as was ever recorded in myth: the apotheosis of an ass. So seriously did this strutting, penny-wise, life-foolish lawyer take himself that he became an artist in living, eventually an artist even in writing, and, when all is said and done, a fit companion even for the immortal Johnson.

Viewed in a more commonplace light, the story of these four

years may be regarded as a parable either of worldly success or prosperity in love. It is clear from Professors Brady and Pottle's account that Boswell's worldly success was founded on nothing less solid than hard work at his lawyer's job. The profits from this gave him the leisure to attend dinners, note his own social and cultural shortcomings, and to improve himself. As the years go by, the assinine jaw opens less cavernously; the bray, though irrepressible, is muted till it harmonizes with the sucking dove. At the end of this period, Boswell has only one social trait left in him, his meanness about money; but since this is a trait which most people respect, especially when it is backed by solid wealth, Boswell remained complacent about this meanness to his dying day.

He indulged in inexpensive extravagances, making himself cheap in more than one sense of the word by squeezing every ounce of publicity out of his Corsican adventure and his Scots lairdship. It is typical of his progress through life and to the extent to which he refined upon himself, that he did his best to become (on the cheap) the Casanova of his day; that he esteemed himself most on the score of the beauties and heiresses with whom he contrived to get at least his name entangled; and that he ended by marrying his cousin, neither a striking beauty nor a considerable heiress, but an admirable girl in every way. That such an ass as Boswell should eventually have had the sense, let alone the emotional aptitude, to love so charming and honest a lady, after cutting amorous capers in every likely meadow, would surprise anyone who had not observed the intense seriousness with which Boswell observed himself. This saved him from imagining that he was anything more than an ass, and so put him in touch with the profoundest truth about mankind. It gave him humility enough and gratitude enough to see Titania in the lady who took him to her heart, ass's ears and all. And, after all, what in essence is your literary artist but one whose ears jut grotesquely but sensitively into the stream of human consciousness, transmitting the least ripple to the thick skull beneath?

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor,
English Studies in Africa.

Dear Sir,

With the consent and co-operation of the poet's widow and nearest relatives, I am engaged in writing a critical biography of the late Roy Campbell. I should therefore be very grateful if any of your readers could supply me with relevant information (including personal reminiscences and the whereabouts of MSS., etc.) or grant me the loan of letters. The latter and any other similar documents would be handled with care, copied, and returned immediately.

Yours faithfully,
W. H. GARDNER.

University of the Orange Free State,
Bloemfontein, South Africa.

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Contributors

Mr L. T. Bennett ...	... Head of Department of English, College of Education, Pretoria.
Professor E. Davis	... Head of Department of English, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
Professor G. H. Durrant	Head of Department of English, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
Mr C. O. Gardner ...	... Lecturer in English, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
Professor D. Inskip	... Head of Department of French and Director of The Little Theatre, University of Cape Town.
Dr M. D. W. Jeffreys	... Research Fellow in Cultural Anthropology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
Mr R. E. Morton ...	... Lecturer in English, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
Professor A. C. Partridge	Head of Department of English, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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